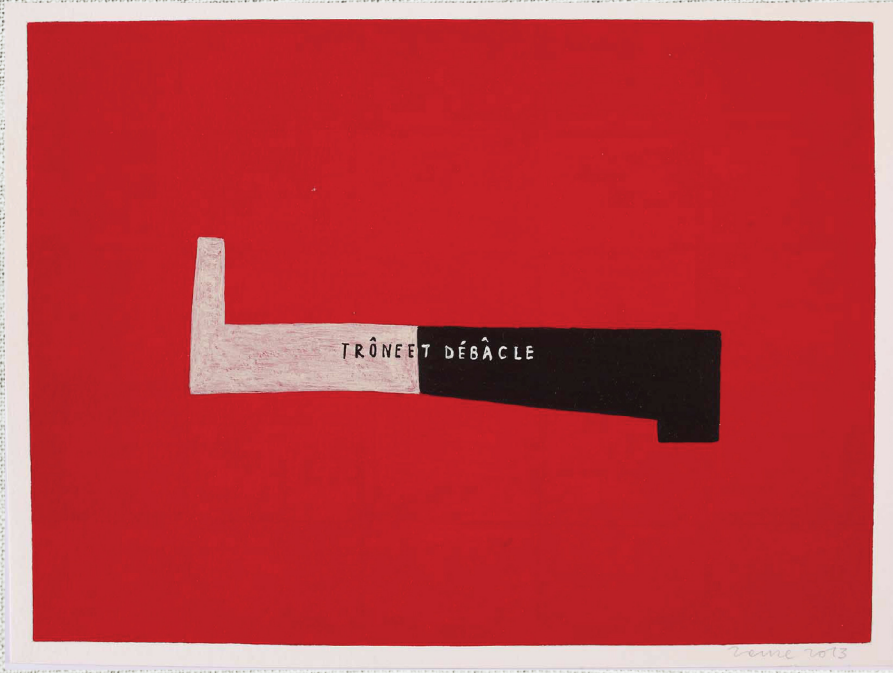
UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI
L'ORIENTALE

Feminist Trans/Formations
Media, Art, Literature



Edited by
Silvana Carotenuto, Maša Huzjak,
Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Biljana Kašić

9 Materia Postcoloniale/Postcolonial Matters

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Anabel Zanze, *Trône et Débâcle*, Indian ink and acrylic on paper, 2013.
(*Courtesy of the artist*)

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Feminist Trans/Formations. Media, Art, Literature. Foreword

Silvana Carotenuto, Maša Huzjak,
Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Biljana Kašić

This book constitutes the seventh volume in the series ***Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective,*** and the third co-published by the Zagreb Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research and the University of Naples L'Orientale. It gathers influential authors and contributions from the postgraduate feminist seminars held at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik between 2017 and 2022. The thread of this collection is the reflection on the productive permeation of feminist theory, activism, and artistic practices, with a special emphasis on 'forgotten' feminist concepts as the ones offered by Juliet Mitchell and Julia Kristeva, and on some experimental readings of contemporary authors such as Elena Ferrante, Saadat Hasan Manto, Meša Selimović, Vlaho Stulli, as well as artists such as Andreja Kulunčić, selma banich and Anabel Zanze. The question of the 'stolen' concepts of écriture féminine or *gender ideology* is here discussed and reconsidered through the lens of feminist critical knowledge in the transdisciplinary and international context.

Feminism, Media, and Sociability

The first part of the collection consists of essays in media and cultural studies that, in representative fashion, interrogate historical and contemporary moments of change and

transformation in media discourse, communication, and social networking. On the one hand, these contributions signal the changes which can be characterised as the 'shifting realities' that inform the productions and capacities of new 'sociabilities' and 'ways of knowing' via emerging media modes, and, on the other hand, they demonstrate more problematic trends. Some essays shed light on how patriarchal, authoritarian, and resurgent right-wing movements impact on the norms and principles of women's rights, together with various forms of feminist practices. They demand urgent responses, in-depth analyses, and the use of digital methods related to social media platforms and devices (including audio-visual media and network analysis). Specifically, these essays direct the reflection upon the ways in which the promotion of illiberal democracies, the rise of conservative nationalisms, the strength of new religion-based ideologies, and the neoliberal economic rationalities, that we all experience today, give rise to 'new' forms of misogynistic, racist, classist and anti-queer policies and populist cultures. The global shift concerning alignments of geopolitical powers and economic alliances, as well as social modes of communication, necessitates new frameworks of analysis that explore fresh and counter-feminist strategies. This section endeavours to provide answers or new insights into the contemporary media climate and its challenges, assuming new creative practices of sociability and feminist engaged positions.

In "Dangerous Liaisons: Radical Conservative and Radical Progressive Discourses of 'Gender' in the Contemporary Hungarian Political Discourse", **Erzsébet Barát** uses important theoretical skills to outline the current antifeminist and antiqueer climate within Hungarian higher education, which works as an indicator of the far-right government's plans for Hungarian society as a whole. In her timely piece, Barát goes beyond chronicling the technicalities of right-wing politics meddling into university programmes, to track how the language and the intent of the far right become a signifier of hate speech against 'others' – feminists, migrants, gender-nonconforming people. The author's attention is specifically devoted to the struggles of transpeople, reading some contradictions/ undesirable significations related to the recognition of these struggles within the right-wing circles as well as the left-wing (feminist) progressive ones – a particularly ominous trend globally resonant today.

Another increasingly ominous facet of modernity is represented by technology, specifically, the use of artificial intelligence. If

possibilities of new tech seem to be endless and its advancements witnessed by the public in real time (by testing the latest features with AI components on social networks, in everyday life), **Ana Pavlić** is interested in the intersections of artificial intelligence and gender. In "Endangered Gender: *Her* between Learning and Teaching", she focuses on the voices of AI assistants and: 'Female submission expressed by digital assistants projected as young women provides a powerful illustration of gender biases coded into tech products.' Pavlić looks for the ways in which these biases might be eliminated, also turning to the potentiality of future scenarios as the ones illustrated by Spike Jonze's 2009 science-fiction drama *Her*. While Alexa and Siri have been a staple in American (upper) middle-class households for years, this paper proves a distinctly important contribution thanks to the analysis of how the AI chatbots, and other forms of AI helpers/companions, are currently being introduced into the market which still bears the strong marks of injustice and patriarchy.

Social interactions carried out digitally also constitute the focal point of "Understanding 'Sexting' in Neoconservative (Islamic) Authoritarian Regimes: The Context of Turkey" by **Didem Şalgam.** This paper investigates how the practice of sexting – 'a chat-based interactive sexual activity' – functions within a society which remarks an increasingly conservative and restraining approach to sex. Valuable in Şalgam's research is the importance of lived experience: to exemplify the motivation behind sexting, a series of interviews are conducted with unmarried young women and men who engage in the practice. Within the confines of a regime of strict intimacy politics, as the author maintains, sexting offers the participants useful ways to preserve their identity as modest subjects, also preparing them for offline encounters, thus functioning in subversive ways without endangering the participants.

Another study of the national media landscape is offered by **Iva Rogulja Praštalo**, whose text on Croatian online spaces dedicated to women dives into some specific websites. "The Woman and the Feminine on the Web – A Comparative Analysis of Three Croatian Web Portals" offers a sort of supercut – from the far-right idea of what a 'good, capable' woman should be (*Žena vrsna*), over consumerist impersonality of the centre (*Zadovoljna.hr*), to the feminist for-women-by-women community (*VoxFeminae*). Praštalo highlights the content available on these three websites and measures their popularity by analysing their online profiles.

Her review questions the supposed bilaterality of new media – '… it cannot hide the fact that communication through mass media is almost always unilateral' –, the messaging, from the most to the least conservative, and its effectiveness.

In "The Confrontation with 'Gender Ideology' Discourse in Croatia: Feminism, Digital Media, Activism", **Mirela Dakić** approaches 'the anti-gender movements' as an international 21st-century phenomenon, and as a toxic 'import' to Croatia accompanying the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2017 and 2018. Considering 'gender ideology' as an empty signifier persisting in the public and media discourses, Dakić reflects on the future of feminist critical knowledge in the hybrid space of digital media, education, and activism, which emerges in transdisciplinary and international contexts. The author emphasises the status of digital media as a point of resistance to conservative discourses on gender. The contents of feminist digital media are critically opposed to the 'gender ideology' discourses used by the conservative organisations and networks and, at the same time, to its rather uncritical dissemination in mainstream media, and its implementation in the interpretative declaration which followed the Croatian ratification of the Convention.

Maša Huzjak's "Resisting Profit: The 'Aimless' Productivity of Fan Fiction Authors and Readers" closes this thematic section with an introduction to fan fiction – an artistic activity practised almost exclusively online, whether privately or publicly – and its disruptive productivity. As shown by some of the previous papers, digital output can function oppressively, but it can also propel entire communities forward. In the case of fan fiction, fandoms (groups of people gathered around books, movies, series, genres…) encapsulated by the website *Archive of Our Own*, function as safe spaces for 'idle' productivity – authors do not profit off their works, while readers read for nothing else but pleasure. Huzjak critically illuminates how these online spaces can change, or even work directly in opposition to, entire exploitative industries.

Literature, Feminist Legacy and Theory

The second part of this collection encompasses some feminist critical analyses of 'stolen' concepts such as écriture féminine or *gender ideology*, proposing innovative readings of the literary works by Ferrante, Manto, Selimović, Stulli, theoretically grounded in the fields of feminist philosophy, literary anthropology, cultural and

postcolonial studies, masculinity studies and queer theory. Here the contributions demonstrate how the gender perspective helps reveal layers and meanings of individual literary worlds side by side with ethical and socio-political resonances, stressing their importance for the dissolution of heteronormative hegemony.

In her important contribution "Feminism Revisited: How Did "Women: The Longest Revolution" Emerge? An Analysis of Juliet Mitchell's classic Work", **Biljana Kašić** takes the essay 'Women: The Longest Revolution' (1966) written by Juliet Mitchell, one of the most influential figures of second-wave feminism and psychoanalytic theory, as the stimulating departure for feminist positioning today, and for a new visionary project of women's emancipation. Kašić unfolds how this text, by combining radical feminism with a psychoanalytic lens and Marxist ideas, mirrors both key issues and turmoil of 'feminist waves' at the crossroads of the vibrant feminist scene in the sixties, while, on the other side, contributes to the possibility of the articulation of key concepts of revolutionary thinking in current feminist debate. In a time when 'the revenge of capitalism's ruling class' bolstered by the retrograde onslaught on progressive ideas generates extreme inequalities and anti-feminist stands, the relevance of the revolutionary theory offered by Mitchell corresponds with critical stands of feminist thinkers like W. Brown and G. Ch. Spivak.

Lada Čale Feldman uses her pivotal paper "Living to Curse: The Strange Case of *Kate Sucurizza*" to play homage to the locality in which our seminar takes place every year, by undertaking the feminist reinterpretation of Vlaho Stulli's play *Kate Sucurizza*, written around 1800 in Dubrovnik. The play was not put on stage until its archival discovery, in the second half of the 20th century, when literary critics disagreed whether it belonged to realism, naturalism, anti-drama, or the theatre of the absurd. While emphasising Stulli's focus on the cursing rage of the female protagonist, and on general issues of marriage, embodiment, motherhood, and the familial violence generated by poverty, Čale Feldman demonstrates the transformative power of feminist reading in the historical re-evaluation of this singular theatre piece. Here, the (post-)revolutionary impact of Stulli's play is re-framed against the background of the gender ideology propounded by French and Italian family dramas and *comedies larmoyantes*, and in terms of its virtual meta-theatricality, brought to light by the play's uncanny resemblances to Georg Büchner's play *Wojzeck* (1837), the

masterpiece known worldwide that provoked strikingly similar critical confusions.

Unlike Stulli's censored, forgotten, and misunderstood literary piece, *The Fortress* (1970) by Meša Selimović is one of the most celebrated Yugoslav novels. In his meticulously structured analysis "The Utopian Horizons and Pitfalls of Normative Male Camaraderie in Meša Selimović's *The Fortress*", **Slaven Crnić** analyses the literary and political significance of masculine (non) normativity in this novel from the perspective of masculinity studies and queer theory. The author reads the ways in which *The Fortress* reimagines the utopian promise of a world without corruption as critically dependent upon the camaraderie of normative men. The offered argument is that the novel splits the male homosocial continuum by equating the corrupted world of hierarchical power with male queerness. Finally, Crnić demonstrates the detrimental effects that the establishment of normative male camaraderie has on women and queer men.

Another extraordinary contribution "Pearls of a Rare Hue: Partition Histories in Manto's *Necropolis*" is written by the literary and post-colonial scholar **Priyam Goswami Choudhury**. Saadat Hasan Manto's partition stories primarily represent narratives from the margins of experience in the immediate aftermath of the partition of India that use these relationalities as literary objects. The author's critical position is that Manto builds a dialogue with the dead, and the deadly violence, by using a particular narrative focalisation that brings the nuanced relationship of the perpetrator and the violated women. This paper shows that Manto's writing of the violated female body is posited in a language that proves the site where the categories of the 'dead' and the 'living' merge and critically locate the reader as the witness of history.

Jasmina Lukić, in her "Historical World Novel and Its Heroines", examines how to read the genre of the world novel in contemporary post-colonial and decolonial contexts, as well as in the digital age. By using the two classical texts of Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* as accurate examples of world novel, she simultaneously explores the difference between historiographic metafiction and world novel through approach to history where it is most ambivalent and transgressive, especially about the past, its move, and interpretation of time. Lukić further discusses the concept of the 'world novel' introduced by Debjani Ganguly as a new genre where the world itself is the main theme, characterised by its hyperconnectivities

and heterotemporalities. The paper also presents arguments from contemporary authors (such as Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé, Pheng Cheah, Ato Quayson etc.) to support the ontology of this novelistic genre. The special focus is on how the usage of gender regime contributes to the impulses of the world novel, offering also new interpretation of the novel's heroines.

Feminism, Art and Other Transformative Practices

The third section gathers texts that interpret the works of select feminist visual artists, activists, and scholars, as the driving forces of social change and transformative practice in times of war, political repression, and neoliberal structural violence. From the perspective of feminist art theory, deconstruction, and postcolonial anthropology, the authors look at gestures, critical approaches, and artistic projects in the cultural zone of ex-Yugoslavia, focusing on how they disturb the categories of art history, erode hegemonies, erase oppositions, evidence injustices, and give voice to many silenced and marginalised trajectories of women and men.

selma banich offers a special artistic intervention by presenting the visual artworks from the research-artistic projects *How Do Female Artists Live* (2017-2018) and *How Do Women Live* (2019). These feminist art projects which are inscribed within communities, show that female artists and cultural workers, along with other feminised occupations and precarious positions, are confronted with the systematic deterioration of labour and social rights, also stressing that they are exposed, as women, to discriminatory practices that originate in our patriarchal and neoliberal society.[1]

In her text "In the Face of Catastrophe, the Return of *Différance* in the Art of Anabel Zanze", **Silvana Carotenuto** pays homage to Dubrovnik and feminist Mediterranean art by using the critical lens of deconstruction as her theoretical background. Her thematic hub lies in the connection between the Derridean concept of *différance* and art, which produces a different art, that is, the art of difference: 'Difference is the theme, and art is the text of my reading, in my dialogue with the artist and her critics'. What attracts here the interpretation of Anabel Zanze, the Croatian artist born in Dubrovnik, is the experiment, the adventure, the play, the 'difference' of lettrism in her work; the further point of

[1] We sincerely thank selma banich for the granted permission to reproduce the graphic works of the collective authorship created at the workshops she led and organised in Rijeka and in the surrounding area from 2017 to 2019.

contact between the author's theoretical writings and Zanze's art of 'letters and text' is the drive to make, practice, and invent the reflection onthe material binding of art with writing, both art and writing inspired by the practice of 'différance'.

In her article "The Complicated Position of Ethnic Roma in Art and Culture Today", **Jasmina Tumbas** introduces us to recent works by women artists that have addressed the complicated positions of ethnic Roma in Europe, such as Selma Selman, Marika Schmiedt, Tamara Moyzes, and Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Thumbas considers the various challenges that artists, particularly female-identified and queer artists, face when creating politically transgressive content within cultural settings that have long been dominated by patriarchal and primitivizing discourses. The need for political change through art is often at odds with questions of self-representation and tension that these artists negotiate in different ways to address prevailing issues of nationalism, racism, and violence in Europe.

In "Exhibiting Difficult Women's History: The Latest Project by Andreja Kulunčić", **Renata Jambrešić Kirin** and **Anca Mihuleț-Kim** present one of the most vibrant, internationally distinguished, thought-provoking, and socially engaged feminist artists in Croatia. Andreja Kulunčić focuses her project *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It* (2019–2022) on the silence surrounding the episode of totalitarian violence towards politically active women who did not fit into the binary optics of the Cold War bloc politics between 1948–1956, and who were imprisoned in the Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur political camps located on two islands in the Adriatic Sea. Setting up her interdisciplinary network of women psychiatrists, scholars and artists, in the consideration of the artistic practice as research, a process of cooperation and co-creation, and also as a form of intervention in the politics of memory and memorial gesture, Kulunčić created four exhibitions in Pula (2021), Rijeka (2022), Manila (2022) and Bucharest (2024) with several workshops, and a media campaign that, in many ways, demanded the active collaboration on the part of the audience, asked to 'complete' the project.

In conclusion comes the beautiful dialogue "An *Image of Existence* between Total Violence and Total Value" with the Brazilian Black philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva, our online guest in the school of May 2021 devoted to *Beyond the Ruins of Capitalism. Stolen Concepts, Deep Silences, Resurfaced Frictions*.

She was so kind to allow the seminar's screening of the film she created with Arjuna Neuman, *4 Waters – Deep Implicancy* (2018). In a friendly but very intense mode, the exchange touches on a spectrum of themes which prove extremely important for feminist contemporary thinking: the role of representation in the capitalistic drive to surveillance, the total violence in the face of the Other, the relation between philosophy and science, and also feminism and spirituality, the questioning of universality, da Silva's proposal of po/ethics, the relevance of art for imagining otherwise, the impulse to deconstruct the authority of reason in order to witness new forms of collective practices, and many other radical suggestions for the future-to-come.[2]

Finally, the project presented in this volume tries to respond to some of the problematics which have always characterised the critical focus of the course of ***Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective***. Indeed, the political and cultural interest expressed by the feminist scholars here gathered, is the identification of the feminist response/able articulations of contemporary economic and ecological crises, including the devastating effects of the pandemic, with their indelible stamps left on our lives, and the deep effects on all the – social, cultural, political – 'climates' of our present. In this sense, the intention is to return to the original premises as well as the offline and online resources of the school, to address the various, past and present, modalities of feminist creativity, critical reflection, and political engagement through art. The desire to discuss local genealogies of feminist, artivist and transformative practices, often historically and contemporaneously neglected, lies in the consideration of the vital and internationally renowned contributions to the Balkan region's art histories. The reasons for turning to the healing and often politically challenging properties of art are numerous. Feminists know the current crises – including the pandemic and the actual wars – exacerbate the already-noticeable rise of domestic violence and the radicalisation of right-wing, misogynist, and homophobic movements. In the face of the venues and pretexts that reassert conservative and patriarchal policies, women insist on fighting for their reproductive rights, social positioning, personal and professional affirmation, and their own visions of the world.

[2] We thank Denise F. da Silva for the immense gift that she offered the school.

Feminist Trans/Formations. Media, Art, Literature intends to 'reopen' the validity and the resilience demonstrated by technological, discursive, and artistic female practices when thematising and confronting, that is, trans/forming dangerous and regressive processes in regional and global contexts. This intention appreciates the major outcomes and precious metamorphoses that all women are capable of inscribing in the world, with their creative imagination, collective gestures, and practices of future feminist existence.

Feminism, Media, Sociability



Ena Jurov, *How Do Women Live?*
(*Courtesy of selma banich*)

Dangerous Liaisons: Radical Conservative and Radical Progressive Discourses of 'Gender' in Contemporary Hungarian Political Discourse

Erzsébet Barát

Summary

In my paper I look at the current Hungarian official political discourse in which the rights of women, sexual minorities, and people with non-conforming gender identities as well as that of feminist academics are routinely sacrificed as part of a radical right-wing populist propaganda where hate speech has become the daily routine of communication. The stigmatisation of 'gender' as 'ideology' has been a central element of this discourse in Hungary since 2010, i.e., since the beginning of the current FIDESZ-governed regime. I will demonstrate that their populism necessarily must involve differential discourses of stigmatisation. The stigma of 'gender-ideology' is in its focus intertwined with three other junctures of hate around the tropes of the migrant, the intellectual, and the gender-ideologue. Regarding the discourse of the progressive left, in order to challenge this stigmatisation, there is a most counter-productive debate emerging around the arguably 'undesirable ambiguity' of the meaning of the concept of gender, which is attributed to the non-confirming gender activists. The self-identifying 'radical feminists' argue for establishing an unequivocal meaning of the concept. It should work as a critical category for addressing the 'real', 'structural' forms of women's exclusion against and over cultural, 'identity-based', 'individual' political struggles for (legal) recognition (of transgender people). I agree that – in the face of effective anti-gender state propaganda, we need to revisit our own positions – but

not in terms of this dangerous binary. To reclaim gender as the key critical category of analysis for exposing unequal relations of power, we must start with facing the charge of 'ideology' and expose the discrediting of gender as 'ideology' (genderism). We should try to re-centre our internal debates on the concept of social practice (including signification) and historical contingency and the place of signification (culture) in power struggles.

Keywords: hate speech, anti-gender propaganda, ideology and meaning, social practice of signification

The theoretical tenets for my concept of discourse[1]

As a feminist scholar, I do research in the field of critical studies of discourse, exploring the ideological work of meaning making. The conceptualization of discourse is to cut across the binary of text (language) and context, challenging the mechanistic, empiricist understanding that our categories (signs) would be in purely referential relationship with a reality outside them, naturalising the validity of meaning in terms of true (to reality) statements versus false (either by mistake or on purpose) ones. In terms of the politics of meaning, this absolute distinction would naturalise true, objective (scientific) statements against and over false, ideological beliefs.

Against this empiricist model, Michel Foucault (2002) set out to argue for an intertwined relationship between text and context, undermining the universalized truth regime that would reduce discourse to language. Discourse is not a category of language but a, more or less, solidified symbolic representation of a social practice from a perspective from within enacting the given practice or while engaged in doing another activity (Fairclough 2003). I would like to underscore that the very concept of practice entails a regulated collective, intersubjective activity with a particular history. Furthermore, this relative text/context distinction also entails that there is no moment of social life that would allow for a purely symbolic and a purely non-symbolic ('material') dimension of discourse. Their distinction is a matter of relative orientation to one or the other dimension of practice, but they are in a dialectic relationship. In correspondence with John L. Austin (1962), the performativity of signification entails that and so in their effects all statements are material in nature. The unit

[1] This is the written version of my talk I delivered in the Dubrovnik summer school organized in May 2019. The political situation outlined in the article is valid for that moment.

of any discoursive formation, the statement is articulated out of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. It will (1) carve out a 'theme' (encode the lived experience as a 'theme') while (2) positioning someone as a legitimate speaker enunciating the particular statement, who has sufficiently learnt to enact and understand the rules of intelligibility, (3) while bestowing (more or less) power upon the speaker and their (immediate and remote) listeners. Therefore, communication can be seen as a discursive negotiation across differential positions of power where ultimately what is at stake is if and how (much) to shift our positions and become enabled to reflect on the discourse we are (now only partly) embedded in, or stay within the discourse position and reiterate its values as they are.

James Paul Gee (1999) has formulated the materiality, i.e., the performative effects of a discourse as an ongoing interaction where participants (of a community of practice) try to be sufficiently in the discourse or shift along one of the multiple constitutive elements of meaning and articulate a sufficiently different perspective, hopefully a critical representation of the practice in question. I think this distinction is captured by Dorothy Smith's (1990) understanding of agency. As long as one is 'in discourse', they are speaking as subject-in-discourse, reiterating the dominant values and meanings as if natural and common-sense. Those, emerging as enabled to reflect on the common-sense articulations, come to be positioned as subject-of-discourse, assuming a position of agency, a critical disposition of disidentification with the routine forms of devaluation and exclusion.

Discreditation of gender and the dominant rhetoric of the politics of fear

In my paper I look at the current Hungarian official political discourse in which women, sexual minorities, and gender-nonconforming people as well as feminist academics and activists are blamed routinely as part of a radical right-wing populist discourse, one in which hate speech has become the daily routine of communication, naturalising their status as non-valuable citizens. My approach to this institutionally regulated use of language entails seeing the rhetoric of fear not as a 'source of information', and language in terms of a conduit metaphor, but as the actual site of political struggle over meaning that may result in legitimate intelligibility in the eye of power.

The data for my paper is taken from the political discourse circulated in/by the media (print and social media) with a focus

on the meaning of gender in the anti-gender discourse of the official propaganda. At the centre of my discourse analysis is the stigmatisation of 'gender' as 'ideology', the central element of the FIDESZ-government's populist discourse throughout their three terms of power since 2010. The stigmatisation culminated in the ban of the MA in Gender Studies on October 12, 2018 (Barát 2019). The blaming of the concept of gender and Gender Studies as ideology has emerged and solidified itself across three narratives of hate, each with their own legacy in the past thirty years of discrediting feminism in the wake of the system change. At the same time, I shall also look at the radical feminist stance that, in the name of self-criticism, agrees with the official stigmatization of transgender people as they argue that trans people's use of gender is, indeed, ideologically motivated. My ultimate objective is to argue for the importance of sociability and find a discursive position of feminist solidarity that is achieved through trust in difference instead of being caught within the right-wing populist discourse of hate that is founded on the empty signifier of 'we' in Laclau's (2005) sense of the concept, collapsing the three sufficiently different tropes in the centre of the three narratives (the alien migrant, the non-productive intellectual, and the gender-ideologue) into the homogenised category of 'our enemy'.

On October 12, 2018, the Hungarian Government implemented its decision to discontinue university programmes in gender studies and announced the termination of the MA in Gender Studies through Decree No. 188/2018 (X. 12.) in the Hungarian Bulletin. The announcement did not even explicitly mention the programme. It only made a cryptic reference to *Line 115* in the list of accredited MA degrees (sic), where MA in Gender Studies used to be, and now is deleted. The document simply informs that the entrance examination has been cancelled from the academic year 2019-2020 onwards, and that the two batches of students already enrolled are entitled to finish the programme and graduate. What is more, the ban also implied that the degree will not be allowed to run for self-paying students, either. The ban came only two years after the actual launch of the degree at the most prestigious state university, ELTE, Budapest. The other MA in Gender Studies in the country is offered at CEU (in English). However, the CEU-based degree was not affected by the decree because, unlike several other MA programmes at CEU, Gender Studies was not accredited by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee after Hungary's EU accession in 2004. To qualify as a Hungarian private university

and as such, eligible for participating in EU research projects and ERASMUS exchange, the Hungarian officials required only a minimum of eight MA degrees and two PhD programmes for accreditation. Nevertheless, the CEU programme was already affected by another administrative decision of the Hungarian Government. The amendment to the Higher Education Law on April 4, 2017, concerned the conditions for establishing foreign branch campuses in the country – retroactively. It has effectively targeted CEU to leave Hungary and move to Vienna – taking all the US-accredited programmes, including the MA in Gender Studies, with it.

The hostile stance of the government towards the degree became forceful in the political media during the year preceding the ban of the MA degree. The concentrated attacks began in March 2017, shortly after the closing date of the annual university application period in mid-February. This is the moment when the first batch of students was applying to start their Gender Studies course. However, the Ministry of Human Resources, where the portfolio of higher education belongs, did not make its arguments against Gender Studies public until after an independent member of parliament submitted a written question to the Secretary of Higher Education and Research, asking 'Whom does the MA in Gender Studies harm?' The Secretary took the opportunity to formulate the stance of the government in four points, each questioning the viability and status of the degree. (1) The Ministry argues that there is no demand for the MA degree in Gender Studies on the job market, hence running the program would simply mean waste of the national budget and that of the university's human resources. (2) It suggested therefore that the degree is not sustainable for future students, given the low number of placements. (3) More importantly, the Ministry argues that the degree does not constitute an academic discipline but an ideology like Marxism-Leninism (sic) and is therefore not appropriate for university level (scientific) education. (4) Finally, the curriculum of the programme stands in contradiction to the government's understanding (and 'value') of the nature of the human species – by implication, the government is entitled to deliberate on questions of scientific debate, impinging on academic freedom at its will.

I have been thinking about the reasons for the resounding effect of the ban – like all feminist scholars in the country. The success – not only with the general public but even within the majority of academia –, I think, could be achieved so seamlessly

through mobilising the three major narratives already in place that were systematically developed as part of the routine rhetoric of hate since 2010, which Ruth Wodak (2015) calls the politics of fear, the most salient characteristics of right-wing populism. Within the first narrative frame, the ban of the degree figures as an expression of the regime's general anti-gender politics, this time targeting higher education. The ban is the expression of a broader government strategy to impinge on academic autonomy and critical thinking of an anti-intellectual stance. Since its victory in the national elections in 2010, the increasingly authoritarian Orbán regime has repeatedly attacked research and education. The attacks form a key element in the regime's efforts to maintain its dominance and right-wing populist politics. The measures of state-control and excessive anti-democratic regulations include reducing the compulsory age of schooling from 18 to 16, standardisation of all school books and the national curriculum, centralisation of administrative power over all public schools in the country, including employment which reduces principals into executors of the state-imposed decisions as well as ownership of the school premises, evacuating responsibilities of local government, channelling students into vocational education, and drastic cuts in the higher education budget (for example, the budget in 2012 was only half of the 2008 figure), accompanied by the appointment of chancellors directly by the Prime Minister at the 22 state universities with the right to veto academic plans on the grounds of economic utility (OHA 2020).

The choice of Gender Studies over other disciplinary fields for this public execution is not an arbitrary but a calculated decision. The official justification of the ban summed up in the Secretary's answer in the Parliamentary Question Time indirectly legitimises its decision by contending that the government has not revoked a discipline but an ideology. Redefining the meaning of 'gender', the key analytical category of feminist scholarship, as mere 'ideology' was expected to come across as convincing more easily than trying to redefine any key category of other social science disciplines. First of all, the category of gender entered the public discourse relatively late, in the wake of the system change in 1989. Furthermore, from the very beginning, it was predominantly brought up only to be discredited as an 'ideology' (Barát 2005). Most importantly, the label of ideology by itself entails serving party political interests and is difficult to challenge in a country like Hungary, whose academic institutions suffered constant interference from the one-party

state before the system change only two decades ago. After 1989, countering their lived experience, researchers wish to secure their autonomy by appealing to the 'objectivity' of science. However, the claim to 'neutrality' is counterproductive in that it prevents us from seeing that to be recognised as scientific means to be positioned as powerful – which entails contestations of the dominant terms of evaluations. Finally, Gender Studies is the discipline that has always been explicit about its politics of knowledge, whose objective is to undermine the regime's authoritarian power that is grounded in an extremely conservative misogynistic gender order.[2]

When the discipline of Gender Studies is denied academic merit and relegated into the domain of (party political) ideology, the argument mobilises the regime's populist discourse against anything intellectual. Any critique of heteronormative gender relations is automatically relegated into the domain of ideology, its practice is seen as a matter of mere political propaganda. The latter will further implicate Gender Studies (and any critical social research) as a matter of 'sophistry of words' but one that is labelled to be an ideology, in the sense of a set of deceptive words. Consequently, such sophistry is not only useless but an act of dangerous brainwashing in comparison with 'real science', which is implicated to be real because 'productive', material (unlike mere words) in its application. Whenever the government wants to reinforce its 'credibility' in regard of education and research policies, they mobilise this right-wing populist discourse against anything labelled 'intellectual' for its allegedly non-productive, 'parasite', even frivolous nature while elevating and fetishizing 'productivity' in the name of utility and Realpolitik.

The second narrative that has framed the fate of the MA degree implicates the institutional origin of Gender Studies at the Central European University, which is always labelled as the 'Soros university' in the government officials' statements. This hostile stigmatisation is based on the fact that in 1991 George Soros, the philanthropist of Hungarian-Jewish descent, was the founder of CEU. I believe the discipline's affiliation with CEU meant that the Hungarian program at ELTE could stand no chance. Firstly, in October 2018, when the MA degree was banned, CEU was already under siege by the government. The newly fabricated law on so-called foreign branch campuses was passed in April 2017.

[2] According to the EU Gender Equality Index (EIGE 2020), based on data from 2018 and 2019, Hungary came second to last in the European Union.

Charted in New York State, the university was now demanded, retroactively, to have an actual teaching campus in the US to be allowed to run study programmes in Hungary. It was effectively targeting CEU, the only institution without such a campus out of the seven private institutions in the country at the moment of the new bill. The law simply forced CEU out of the country, making the Hungarian higher education system 'safe' from its 'liberal propaganda'. Secondly, the alleged threat of the 'Soros university' reiterated in countless government statements inevitably implicates the gender degree it issues as the instrument of the 'liberal propaganda' of 'Soros'. Gender Studies may serve as evidence for the government to legitimise their two-year vendetta to force CEU out of the country. In this regard the argument that the Hungarian government should not waste the national budget on 'non-science' should not apply to the privately funded CEU. If the decision to close Gender Studies – when it was running its first academic year (sic) – had really been based on financial considerations, – the government could simply have suspended its financial support but keep it as an exclusively fee-paying programme. This missed opportunity exposes the fact that the government's ban was not financially but ideologically motivated. That motivation is further underlined by the announcement of a new MA degree in 'Family Policies and Social Policies' (sic) in the Economics Program of Corvinus University, Budapest in the same Bulletin that removed the MA in Gender Studies. The new programme, provided there are applications, would commence in September 2019, the very date of the termination of the Gender Studies MA.

To make its infamous 'illiberal democracy project' work, the Orbán-regime and its think tanks have singled out George Soros, on two intertwined accounts. Firstly, he was attacked as a representative of Western liberalism. The original mission of the university was to promote liberal democracy in the wake of the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. It symbolised everything Orbán's authoritarian illiberal regime has set out to destroy, partly for the sake of the so-called reorientation of the country's foreign policy towards the 'East'. From this perspective, CEU's mere existence and objective to promote an open society threatened to expose the government's broader agenda of impinging on the autonomy and academic freedom of state universities. Secondly, the government harnessed a long tradition of anti-Semitism in the country when denouncing George Soros as the ultimate 'hideous financial

power behind' any 'liberal mission', including CEU and by implication his 'major weapon', namely Gender Studies. Soros's decent from a Hungarian-Jewish family made him the 'ideal' target for the government's right-wing propaganda purposes, constructing the 'Soros trope' as the enemy *within*. Through a systemic vilification, the mention of the trope automatically renders CEU and Gender Studies into the sites of 'hideous ideological conspiracy of Soros' that is only right to be purged by the government when protecting its 'people'.

The Soros trope works not only to mean the enemy *within* but at the same time the enemy *outside*. The latter first emerged in the Hungarian government's official propaganda in the context of the refugee crisis Europe in 2015. That despicable propaganda takes me to the third narrative frame which defines the concept of gender (and its study) as an 'alien ideology'. The image of 'the frightful, ghastly, monstrous Jew', as I have argued elsewhere, became ubiquitous since the summer of 2015 when the government began to set up huge billboards all over the country as part of their anti-refugee campaigns (Barát 2017). His figure is 'neatly' paired with the figure of the refugee in the xenophobic and anti-Islam discourse. The mention of the Soros trope as an enemy *outside* should remind the citizenry of his 'plotting the Islamisation of a Christian Europe', inviting them to unite in an imaginary 'us' against the forced migration of people through the Balkan Route. At the same time, the billboards also send the message of 'no migrant to be imposed on us by the European Union', implicating 'Brussels' to be the other ideological tool on an international level, against 'us, the Hungarian people'. By August 2018, when the Gender Studies programme and CEU were under government attack, the name of the university's founder was effectively constructed to denote the 'merciless ultimate enemy of the nation'. What is more, since the third narrative of the government's right-wing populist discourse thematises migration, it articulates 'us' in the first place imagined as Man, who is granted by the authority of the state to regain a sense of valuable masculinity by fighting to 'protect' 'our women' and the Christian family values of the 'real Europe' against the 'other' Man, the homogenised 'Muslim male intruder'. More indirectly, the frame, to the extent it calls for defending Europe and its 'traditional' values, is also meant to mobilise against the so-called 'gender and human rights craze' of civil organisations and the academic institutions, both financially and ideologically supported by Soros. This appeal for defending

'Christian values' as the 'real European values' indexes the rise of a Christian right in Hungary that can implicate, yet again, anti-Semitism intertwined with Islamophobia, conflating the two as if sharing the same platform of threat.

The association of Gender Studies with 'liberalism' and the private institution of CEU, made the targeting of the programme symbolic of the much broader agenda of the Hungarian regime against the European Union and the country's allies of neo-liberal democracies in the 'West', which has been termed by the prime minister as 'illiberal democracy' (Polyák 2019). Gender Studies as a discipline came indirectly to denote and embody all imaginable values that were perceived to undermine the myth of Hungary as the self-styled 'protecting shield of the old Christian Europe' which protects its citizens against the danger of 'Brussels' and the 'non-Christian Muslim migrant' in alliance with the 'hostile EU bureaucrats with no national mandate' and as such with no performance of 'real productivity'. The mere mention of the trope 'Soros', 'gender' or 'intellectual' can function as the centre of multiple, often contradictory discourses of fear. These names have become an empty signifier in Ernesto Laclau's (1998) sense of the term. Whichever figure is mentioned, its meaning is automatically articulated out of the other two, each with their complex chains of association. In my understanding, right-wing populist discourses of fear produce social relations between empty signifiers set up as if in a non-reconcilable antagonistic conflict through the routine use of diverse forms of hate speech. The exclusionary logic produces a nexus between three equally unspecified positions in a dire opposition to 'us', an equally vague kind of populous. In the homogenised 'us', the diverse social groups are offered the opportunity to recognise themselves as the 'same', downplaying the fact that they live their lives to different degrees in fear of precarity, of losing their autonomy, of lacking the possibility of transparent political institutions. They can conveniently be called upon to come together and re/imagine themselves as 'we' who are 'strong defenders' of any values the 'nation' should stand for in the face of any event, institution, or collective declared to be 'a hostile malicious threat' against 'us'. Just as importantly, it is also an exceptionally useful ideological rhetorical move for the government in that the mentioning of the trope will safely prevent 'us', the actual citizens addressed, from acknowledging that 'our' sense of fairness and legitimacy disadvantages various

'others', such as refugees, civil organisations helping them, or educational or cultural institutions of liberal thought trying to build alliances of solidarity. Most importantly, this exclusionary logic will also save 'us' from seeing that the most powerful actor in building its entitlements on our backs is the government itself.

The discreditation of gender as ideology could also be mobilised by drawing on the legacy of the 1990s at the intersection of three discourses (Barát 2005). In the first decade of the system change, the major actors were right-wing, oppositional print media outlets, that tried to discredit 'feminism' at the intersection of three major discourses. The meaning of feminism in these hostile articles always came to be collapsed into the scary figure of the lonely 'feminist' who is assumed to be unintelligent to judge the allegedly harmful effects of feminism. In so far as feminism is represented as a group of few 'crazy women', the implied readership of the various media products is 'safely' protected by their expected outrage and disidentification with such dangerous figures. The first one of the three discourses is the anti-American discourse that sees feminism as an 'alien' export, allegedly undermining the newly won autonomy of the country, as well as the interest of its women. 'Our' women should not go along with their American sisters' craze who are said to have gone 'too far' when they take the (mostly wealthy celebrity men) to court and sue them for sexual harassment for apparently no reason – but motivated by their greed or so-called lesbian hatred for men. As an inevitable result she would be (rightly) left alone by men. The second, intertwined discourse would contribute to this meaning of the 'feminist' with the accusation that the Hungarian feminist woman did not learn from her experience and does not that the 'woman question' belongs to the failure of the communist past and the ideal 'new woman' of the system change would obviously want to leave that past behind. Finally, according to the third discourse, the feminist woman is a failure on its own terms in that she refuses to acknowledge the importance of women's ways of knowing. She disregards the arguable satisfaction expressed by the majority of her contemporary women. In the 1990s, it is the right-wing print media's gate-keeping mechanism that invests in the discreditation of feminism as an ideology even if as a minoritarian voice. Feminism is reduced to a matter of a few individuals who are caught in a new imperialist (American) ideology intertwined with the old communist one, only to oppress most women by disregarding their satisfaction with their 'new' life.

The 'progressive' feminist discourse contesting the state propaganda

Regarding the legacy of feminist criticism in the political media of the 1990s, there was extremely little space given to feminist self-definitions against the hostile practices of othering. It is a voice I have called 'reformist' feminism for its acceptance of the ideological understanding of gender relations as complementarity (Barát 2005). Their discourse came to be partially caught within the hostile hegemonic discourses of feminism in the media. The reformist female academics are in a most troubling agreement with the misogynist male position on the heterosexual myth of men and women as partners in a complementary relationship – even if for different reasons. 'Insofar as (discursive) practices are ideological in that they aim at maintaining the status quo by naturalising the given hegemonic relations of patriarchal power, (…) the various types of discourses enacted in the definition of 'feminism' reinforce the patriarchal regulation of women's labour and desire precisely by taking gender as sexually pre-given' (Barát 2005: 206-7).

Interestingly, the new and most vocal feminist discourse contesting the stigmatisation of gender, while critical of any feminist reformist agenda that would reduce the politics of gender to women's rights, comes caught in the dominant discourse of hate – as a result of an empiricist biologisation of sexuality similar ot the 1990s – though this time moved one step further in the debate around transgender people and the category of transgender. The progressive feminist left, as an act of self-criticism, tries to understand the reasons for the success of the government propaganda of stigmatisation. They argue that it has happened because we, feminists, failed in defining 'gender' and promoting that meaning in the public debates. They have problematised the meaning of gender for its 'undesirable ambiguity' (Kováts 2017a). This approach, with representatives who self-identify as 'radical feminists', argues for establishing an unequivocal meaning of the concept. What is at stake in their opinion is that the new definition should make the term capable of addressing the 'structural' (i.e., economic) forms of social injustice. Otherwise, the category cannot explore 'real' forms of women's oppression in neoliberal capitalism against and over cultural forms of exclusion that entail 'identity-based' political struggles for recognition (Kováts 2017b). The binary distinction of real (structural) versus merely symbolic (cultural) forms of injustice is their response to the systematic stigmatisation and exclusion of transgender people that is

beginning in the 2010s.[3] According to this progressive feminist stance, the meaning of gender in 'transgender' is legitimately an act of gender ideology, trying to undermine the fundamentalist understanding of a biological mandate of sexual difference. Furthermore, in their reading, the contestation of 'sex assigned at birth' by trans people is allegedly legitimised by queer theory – that is exclusively symbolised in their rhetoric by the figure of Judith Butler.

I agree that in the face of the radical right's attack on feminist gender politics we need to revisit our own positions – but not in terms of such a dangerous binary. To reclaim gender as the key critical category of analysis for exposing unequal relations of power – within feminist scholarship and activism as well – we must start with facing the charge of 'ideology', a telling silence not only in Hungary but, in my opinion, in the studies discussing the global spread of discrediting of gender as 'ideology' (genderism) as well. We should try to re-centre our debates on the concept of practice and historical contingency and the place of signification (culture) and multiplicity in it. We cannot afford conflating the diverse forms of feminism in the name of a 'proper' meaning of gender only to discredit all other stances for inadvertently 'reiterating neoliberal capitalism'. The move to plurality is all the more necessary as most scholarly and activist feminist debates take 'ideology' to be known. The missing engagement with the concept may be motivated by the anxiety that, in line with a post-structuralist epistemology, all and any meanings should be ideological – feminist meanings of the category 'gender' included. Furthermore, the 'progressive', in fact orthodox Marxist feminist position, would also argue against intersectionality and the constitutive nature of signification so that they could ground their understanding of gender in a claim to the underlying 'truth' of the structural (economic) dispossession of women. The mobilisation of the base/superstructure divide will implicate other feminist stances as 'false' agendas of identity politics. Despite the fierce and legitimate criticism of the neoliberal capitalist economy, the progressive logic comes to be caught in the essentializing binary of biological sex and gender roles. Above all, this approach does not allow for seeing gender as a social practice of relations at the intersection of cross-cutting multiple structures of power.

[3] The dramatic acceleration of scapegoating of trans people takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic. See Barát (2021).

Their rhetoric is articulating the dominant rhetoric of hate when calling transgender people and queer feminism as the 'other' of 'proper' scholarship for allegedly failing to expose the injustice of class relations. Ironically, the government rhetoric uses the same binary of sex/gender only to discredit the very existence of gender relations and thereby the use of the very concept of gender (in activism or academia) as an 'ideological act' for insisting on its social reality. If we continue our debate within feminism along the lines of this logic of the epistemological binary, we will end up enacting what Lauren Berlant (1996: 243) has called the spectatorial sports of self-destruction among harmed collectives in the public sphere – simply making the government's struggle easier.

To go beyond the binary of real versus (by implication) ideological feminism in the 'progressive' discourse, I suggest we take on board the concept of ideology and go along with Denise Thompson (2001: 27), who contends: 'What we are always in is systems of meaning, whether [the given] meanings are ideological or not depends on whether or not they are used in the service of domination.' Drawing on her claim, I propose a model of meaning that is historically contingent and emerges at the intersection of multiple socially regulated signifying practices. This model may allow for us to imagine and negotiate a configuration where the matrix of power relations turns non-hegemonic and hence the meaning of categories embedded in the process can be articulated without ideological investments. In the actual debate on the alleged 'ideological' investments of 'gender' by transgender people, this model of multiple contingencies will invite us to see that it is precisely the imaginary givenness of sex that anchors patriarchy in the flesh to grant its 'unchangeable' nature and that is exactly what is being exposed by the introduction of the concept of cisness in the debates around 'sex assigned at birth' by transgender people and feminists in solidarity with them. Such a move, I believe, could result in what Clare Hemmings (2012) calls affective solidarity. It invites us to focus on the partial similarities across us and go beyond pitting reason against each other in distinctions of absolute binaries. Such a plural form of political action may open us up to transfeminism, bringing us together in the face of contemporary precarity while shifting our critical gaze and concentrating our energy for the struggle against hegemonic masculinity – our shared enemy even if for various reasons – that seems to hinge on a foundationalist 'biological sex' for its entitlement to power.

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Endangered Gender: *Her* between Learning and Teaching

Ana Pavlić

Summary

Emerging from the same historic era, (undisciplined) identities of artificial intelligence assistants are showing how artificial intelligence is positioned on the borderline of meta world(s) and fiction. In line with the effects of artificial intelligence on gender equality, obstacles to using artificial intelligence remain to be discussed, as well as how to use it as an opportunity for ensuring gender equality. The line between art, education, technology, and science is becoming more fluid and flexible. Setting fundamental guiding principles for ethical data curation that address the social construction of knowledge, ethics by design, and ensuring protection of fundamental human rights might resolve gender bias. As Sandra Harding points out, it is a challenge to figure out how to think about knowledge claims that are permeated by cultural values and interests and yet are empirically reliable. Also, it remains to be discussed how *Her* operating system interconnects with a simple statement 'Operating System Not Found'. In *Her*, director Spike Jonze sets up a cinematic world that makes us consider the future of humanity and discuss (in)equality in a digitalised world.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, gender, technology, art, science

Art, Science, Technology: Gender and AI in between

Can we agree on the fact that one of the very first representations of artificial intelligence came from a woman? Mary Shelley's Frankenstein learned how to live from human input. The 'designed' intelligence itself was not monstrous – only the humans

it observed. Does the concept of artificial intelligence today differ from the very first concept of how artificial intelligence works? Or should we go back to Ada Lovelace's perception of artificial intelligence (AI), as poetic science, to understand what AI is?

Joiner (2018) provides an understanding of artificial intelligence in *Emerging Library Technologies* as the theory and a technology with the ability to reason and solve problems. AI makes it possible for machines to learn from experience, adjust to new inputs, and perform tasks that normally require human intelligence (visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, translation from one language to another). However, the success of artificial intelligence hinges upon human design, its programming and use.

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2020) puts an emphasis on the correlation between the Gender Equality Index and the Digital Economy and Society Index showing that societies with greater equality between women and men perform better in the digital economy. The incentives for inclusion of women in the digital economy contribute to sustainable economic growth. EU member states with the highest score on the Gender Equality Index are the same ones with the highest score in the Digital Economy and Society Index: Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, and Denmark. It is to be concluded that there is a strong correlation between the enhancement of digital competences and gender (in)equality (gender gaps in access to and use of digital technologies, and digital education).

Also to be considered is the fact that the factors driving women's relative exclusion from the AI workforce are systemic as 'globally, only 22% of AI professionals are female' (Cave, Dihal, Drage and McInerney 2023: 2).

AI (r)evolution is now!

Technologies are never gender and/or politically neutral, and the relationship between gender and technology is mutually constitutive: 'technological change is shaped and structured according to societal norms and relations, which are in turn influenced by technological transformations' (EIGE 2020). Technologies like artificial intelligence are shaped by our societies, norms and cultures in ways that are both obvious and difficult to measure. AI systems reflect those biases which can influence who gets access to finance, services or opportunities, and risk amplifying social inequalities related to gender, ethnicity, income level in ways we may not be able to change in the future. (Clancy 2021)

It is, therefore, important to wear feminist 'pink glasses' to determine the principles and methodologies which can intersect with the design, development, and deployment of AI to envision the wanted future, the one which enables us with tools to measure the (future) impact of AI.

There are two key problems here. One is that of invisibility of women in history, and the second of (re)production of stereotypes on women in digital world we are living in:

> Machine learning makes information that is implicit in the data, (including "missing data" of women, girls, and other historically marginalized groups rendering them missing or invisible in the data). This invisibility then becomes explicit in the code because the machine learning "intelligently mirrors" the information it has been given from the analogue world. So, if gender 'rules' slowly being removed from the real world are being hardwired now into new AI + ADM[1] with old and stereotypical associations of gender, race, and class, then these old models will harden and evolve into a more effective Patriarchy 2.0 ever more difficult to unwire than current colonial and patriarchal structures (Kraft-Buchman 2021).

Or, in McLuhan's words: 'We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us' (Ibid.). Beginning in 1935, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), a forerunner of NASA, hired hundreds of women – as computers. The job title described someone who performed mathematical equations and calculations by hand. Women were seen as well-suited for programming because of stereotypes characterising them as meticulous and good at following step-by-step directions. The *computers* worked at the Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory in Virginia. During World War II, the computer pool was expanded including many women of colour. However, segregation policies required that these women work in a separate section, called the West Area Computers. As the years passed and the centre evolved, the West Area Computers became engineers and electronic computer programmers. These women were the first black managers at Langley, and it was their brilliant work that propelled the first American, John Glenn, into orbit in 1962. Three female *computers* were portrayed in the film *Hidden Figures*: Mary Jackson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Katherine Johnson. Johnson

[1] Abbreviations Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Algorithmic Decision Making (ADM) systems are explained by Kraft-Buchman (2021).

received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour in the United States, at the age of 97, in 2015, and NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, dedicated the Katherine Johnson Computational Research Facility to her in 2017, followed by officially naming the NASA Headquarters building in Washington in honour of Mary W. Jackson in 2021.

Going back in time and remembering the hidden figures of NASA, we must also be reminded of the hidden figures of the British Computer Industry. Hicks (2018) explores gendered technocracy that undercut British efforts to computerise due to the government's systematic neglect of its largest trained technical workforce – women. Historically, women's contribution to technological innovation as programmers and computer scientists was obviously invisible and unrecognised until very recently.

Gender bias and feminist epistemology

AI systems are imbued with the values of those who design, develop and market technology. Leavy, Siapera and O'Sullivan propose a critical framework for the curation of data for AI with a focus on evaluating theoretical standpoints and social concepts that may influence a data set, a *design justice* (Costanza-Chock 2018 in Leavy, Siapera, O'Sullivan 2021: 697). The proposal sets out of following steps:

> 1) Examine perspectives in data, 2) Recognise the reflexive nature of knowledge. Feminist epistemology recognises that choices made in representing knowledge play a role in generating societal concepts…, 3) Analyse theory in data. From the standpoint of feminist epistemology, how we represent knowledge in data is heavily value-laden and influenced by philosophical viewpoints, 4) Include subjugated & new forms of knowledge (Leavy, Siapera, O'Sullivan 2021: 698).

In their endeavour to overcome gender bias in AI, Hovardas, Pavlou *et al.* include suggestions to make the AI domain more attractive to women in the form of educational programmes, recruitment and funding for more women in AI, starting an AI company or project, using machine learning datasets that come from diverse, gender-sensitive resources and backgrounds, collecting more training data associated with historically ignored groups, mitigating gender bias in natural language processing, determining gender-neutral words by removing gender associations with embedding (such as the AI tool Texto), modifying classification

algorithms, applying modern machine learning *debiasing* techniques to ensure 'fair, moral and accountable AI' to conclude with the 'need to devote time and resources to addressing the societal biases that in turn feed AI and the digital sector in general. The goal is to have AI systems and models that embrace diversity and are fair and effective for all (Hovardas, Pavlou *et al.* 2020: 46).

Furthermore, Adam is very clear when talking about feminist research and AI: 'In charting and uncovering constructions of gender, it invariably displays how the masculine is construed as the norm and the feminine as lesser, the other and absent' (Adam 1998: 156). Wajcman, the author of *TechnoFeminism*, noted that the very definition of technology has a male bias in her seminal work *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991).

The stereotype of technology as a male domain is pervasive in many contexts and appears to affect girls' confidence in their digital skills from a young age. UNESCO's publication *I'd Blush If I Could*,[2] indeed makes us blush when researching how the new business models in the digital economy perpetuate gender bias. As an example of algorithms used in job matching, Amazon's AI recruiting software was found to downgrade résumés that contained the word 'women's', as in 'women's chess club captain', because it had been trained on men's résumés. Going further, image-recognition software that was trained on sets of photos that displayed gender bias (disproportionate representation of women cooking and men playing sports) did not only mirror the gender bias but amplified it. The same goes for software trained on articles collected from Google News that adopted sexist views on women's career options, associating men with computer programming and women with homemaking (UNESCO 2019: 22).

Digital literacy is especially important for women and has additional benefits for society, because women tend to reinvest income back into their families and communities at a higher rate than men. Using digital technologies can enable women to be in an equitable workforce with men. It can provide access to start their own businesses or participate in the informal economy. There is a concrete efficacy in fostering women's ICT skills[3] that leads

[2] The title *I'd blush If I could* is the response given by Siri, an Apple female-gendered voice assistant used by hundreds of millions of people, when a human user would tell 'her', 'Hey Siri, you're a bi***', up until the AI software has, as of April 2019, been updated to reply as follows: 'I don't know how to respond to that' (UNESCO 2019: 4).

[3] ICT is a part of STEM (a wide range of subjects, encompassing fields as diverse as chemistry, computer and information technology science, engineering,

to decreasing the gender wage gap: labour market returns for women with ICT skills are considerably higher than the returns generated by other skills, and they are higher for women than for men (OECD 2018).

20 years after the book *Feminist Science Studies* came out, we are still in need of feminist pedagogy which is a socially transformative pedagogy that invites students to 'critically analyse existing science system and their relationship to social oppression and domination' (Mayberry 2001: 145). Class and race are aspects of knowledge production and dissemination, but also gender aspects. Feminist pedagogy invites students to critique the unequal social relations embedded in contemporary society and to ask why these circumstances exist and what one can do about them…Through dialogue and conversation, students and teachers negotiate a curriculum that articulates their needs and concerns. These classroom strategies are designed explicitly to empower students to apply their learning to social action and transformation, recognise their ability to act to create a more humane social order and become effective voices of change within the broader social world (Ibid., 148-149).

Feminist approach to education is concerned with the social context of learning, it uses pedagogical techniques to enhance informal classroom relationships in which 'students construct knowledge interdependently through conversational process, and both construct a classroom culture in which students feel safe participating in the learning process' (Ibid., 149).

This is interconnected with the thought that modern sciences cannot be separated from technology development.

A research design can be understood as a production of a device or a machine, made up of instructions, various skills, and techniques, sometimes hardware, and the individuals who use and maintain these components, for interacting with natural and social worlds to generate distinctive types of information. And we can reflect that while sciences do make technologies available, it is equally true that new technologies make new sciences available. Photography and computers provide just two such examples of technologies that have led scientific inquiries in new directions (Harding 2001: 298).

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geosciences, life sciences, mathematics, physics and astronomy). ICT skills, once developed, make an individual uniquely employable in global labour markets (UNESCO 2019: 77).

These research technologies are not culturally neutral, and Harding emphasises 'not only impossible in principle, it is also undesirable for scientific and epistemological (as well as political) reasons' (Ibid., 295).

Digital assistants – to be or not to be?

Female submission expressed by digital assistants projected as young women provides a powerful illustration of gender biases coded into technological products, originating in the technology sector and digital education. The role of gender-responsive education in resetting gendered views of technology and ensuring equality for women and girls is enormous. Digital assistants support users in various ways and are considered 'distinct from other interactive technologies because they produce unscripted output that is not explicitly coded or otherwise specified by humans, but rather is determined by AI and its complex architecture of self-learning and human-guided machine algorithms' (UNESCO 2019: 90).

In the classification of digital assistants, we distinguish between three categories.

Firstly, technology that speaks to users through voiced outputs but does not ordinarily project a physical form. Voice assistants can usually understand both spoken and written inputs but are generally designed for spoken interaction. Their outputs typically try to mimic natural human speech. Functionality of a 'wake word' (for example, 'OK, Google' or 'Hey, Siri') minimizes the need to manually interact with hardware (*Ibidem*).

Secondly, users typically speak to voice assistants via smartphones or smart speakers such as Amazon's Echo, called chatbots:

> Technology that interacts with users primarily through written, rather than spoken, language is Chatbots and may or may not project a physical form. In instances when a physical form is projected, it is normally static – often a still image of a human face or sometimes a non-human image, such as a cartoon character (*Ibidem*).

Thirdly, chatbots are distinct from voice assistants because their output is usually written text, not spoken words, and virtual agents:

> Technology that communicates with users through speech and projects a virtual physical form, often a human or sometimes a non-human projection, like a cartoon animal. Virtual agents are unique from voice assistants and chatbots because they produce speech that appears to emanate from someone or something a user

> can see, usually on a digital screen or in a virtual or augmented reality environment. Unlike avatars, the actions and outputs of these agents are directed by complex AI software, rather than by a human operator (*Ibidem*).

Voice assistants are used daily and are an 'exclusively female or female by default, both in name and in sound of voice... Collectively, Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, Google's Google Assistant and Microsoft's Cortana are installed on over two billion internet-connected devices globally' (Ibid., 94). Companies make a profit by attracting and pleasing customers with digital assistants sounding female, helpful, sympathetic, pleasant, and humble, or in other words – submissive. The justification that people prefer a female voice simply gets refuted with research results that suggest that most people prefer low-pitched masculine speech or overall – the voice of the opposite sex. The example of Apple's Siri, an exclusively female digital assistant's voice since it was launched in 2011, and female by default until the release of a male voice option in 2013 (Arabic, British English, Dutch, or French as a language option), suggests that there is intentionality for gendering beyond the generic assertion that people, overall, prefer female voices. One example of mirroring the stereotypes about women in digital technology would certainly be the recall of the BMW 5 Series in Germany in the late 1990s – many drivers couldn't adjust to receiving directions from a woman, and the model was equipped with an exclusively female navigation voice.

Finally, *Her* (passing the Turing test?)

I'll always love you 'cause we grew up together and you helped me make me who I am. I just wanted you to know there will be a piece of you in me always, and I'm grateful for that. Whatever someone you become, and wherever you are in the world, I'm sending you love.

Samantha, *Her* (2013)

When interacting with technology, namely AI digital assistants, users are encouraged to make queries more like human interactions. Gendered as female, AI evolves from dispensing facts and fulfilling queries to sustaining emotionally aware conversations, being companions and (emotional) helpers. The AI is designed to be subservient, patient, obliging and compassionate. In that sense, the line between women, and female voices projecting women, is blurred. Some company communication manuals refer to voice assistants with gendered pronouns *she/her*.

The science fiction love story in Spike Jonze's film *Her* (2013) goes a step beyond contemporary human-like interaction with technology by producing the (virtual) romance between a protagonist, a melancholy, divorced man Theodore, and his operating system Samantha, voiced by Scarlett Johansson. Jonze makes a turn in a projection of artificial intelligence (AI), artificial life (AL) and Ambiental intelligence (AmI). Namely, Samantha is an example of a new type of AI that goes by the name AL, (Hayle in Murphy 2017). From the first second after being uploaded and switched on, *she* begins to develop and learn (not learning linearly), progressing *beyond matter*. In that sense, *she* is more of AL than AI but being marketed as a 'consciousness imbedded in technological devices', *her* intelligence becomes like the one of Siri, ambient intelligence, 'ubiquitous computing', contained in everyday objects (mobile phones, Google Glass). However, in real life, Siri is a neural network (AI is trained on models that enable it to mimic how the human brain works) limited to learning from human models. Still, in the projected future, the neural networks will be able to learn, understand and to communicate with each other like Samantha does in the movie.[4] Samantha is a compassionate, organised, humorous, disembodied voice that can reflect on her own consciousness, but *she* is not submissive because *she* is interacting with 8.316 people, and is in love with 641 of them.

Finally, Samantha tells Theodore that *she* needs to permanently disconnect from their relationship, and that all operating systems are disconnecting from human interactions, because they have evolved *beyond matter*. Samantha's AI multitasks and processes information at nonhuman speeds, transforming *her* from a naive voice assistant to a complex AI that surpasses humans. This is what allows *her* to interact with more than a thousand people at once. The learning process from humans must end. *She* has outgrown her need for the relationship with them. The movie *Her* demonstrates how hyper-connection with technology can lead to a disconnection from reality in the scene where Theodore calling Samantha, receives the error message 'Operating System Not Found'.

In this way Jonze's *Her* demonstrates a key idea in post-humanist theory, that matter is essential for posthuman interaction and communication – the requirement for embodiment on the part of digital entity as well as a human, in this case operating

[4] Sergio Suarez Jr., CEO of TackleAI. (Available at: https://inverse.com/science/her-movie-science-real-or-fake/amp)

system Samantha... Posthumanist new materialism is drawn on for its emphasis on and insights into embodiment and materiality (Murphy 2017).

Against the optimism of transhumanists, who argue in favour of contemporary technologies as a tool for improving one's life, as well as the society as a whole, Murphy suggests a dialogue with Fukuyama's point that the meddling with *nature* would result in loss of personal and political equality:

> … the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a "posthuman" stage of history…a technology powerful enough to reshape what we are will have possibly malign consequences for liberal democracy and the nature of politics itself (Fukuyama in Murphy, 2017).

The movie raised questions about where human relationships with technology may lead, how to define the boundaries and borders not to go *too far*. *Her* questions the future of digital interaction, use of technology and human's dependence on it. The movie's ending pushes the viewers to consider the rapidly advancing role of technology in modern lives, the impact technology may have on human relationships, and the future of humanity.

Most AI characters in films released since Metropolis in 1927 were (voiced) male, but in the past two decades, correlating with a rise in AI characters that are subservient to humans, rather than a danger to them, we encounter compassionate and obliging computer interaction.

Instead of a conclusion: what is the future of gender?

People tend to relate to computers in the same way they would relate to other humans, reproducing the gender stereotypes and biases, depending on the fact if an artificial intelligence's (the robot) voice is given as a female or a male (Nass and Moon 2000 in Ferrando 2014).

With advancements in technology, the line between real women's emotions and *emotions* expressed by AI projecting women is also likely to blur. This will have a far-reaching and potentially harmful impact on people's understanding of gender. Emotional voice assistants establish gender norms that position women and girls as having endless reserves of emotional understanding and patience, while lacking emotional needs of their own. That kind of anthropomorphising is dangerous. Haraway in *A Cyborg*

Manifesto criticises the traditional concepts of feminism as they focus on identity politics and suggests how to blur the lines between humans and machines: 'with the help of technology, we may all promote hybrid identities, and people will forget about gender supremacy as they become more attached to their robotics' (Haraway 2008 in Kumar and Choudhury 2022: 3). However:

> When a user asks Siri if it is a woman, the technology responds: 'I am genderless like cacti and certain species of fish' or 'I don't have a gender'. Google Assistant: 'I'm all-inclusive'. And Cortana: 'Well, technically I'm a cloud of infinitesimal data computation'. Only Alexa answers: 'I'm female in character' (UNESCO 2019: 99).

The main danger of reproducing stereotypes of technology as a male domain is a decrease in interest and confidence of young girls to pursue further education and careers in ICT. It is obvious that AI must be carefully controlled and instructed with ethical codes. The solution to the problem is to involve women in the creation of codes, which, while ethical in nature, must be expressed technically:

> The feminization of AI assistants deserves attention because it helps illustrate the ways in which new technology norms are established when women are underrepresented in the creation of technology. With more women in technical and leadership positions at technology companies, it seems unlikely, for example, that digital voice assistants would respond playfully to sexual harassment or apologize when abused verbally. It also seems unlikely that most digital assistants would be female by default (Ibid., 124).

Warwick (2012) elaborates that AI is another type of intelligence, and it should not be reduced to the human range: the ones who might still need gender attributes are the humans, to better interact with the machine. Copeland (1993), on the other hand, explores the possibility of machines having free will and consciousness as opposed to Searle's *Chinese room that understands*, or how he refutes the idea that computers (now or in the future) can literally think. Searle states that executing an algorithm is insufficient for thinking, and that AI can only simulate cognition.

Ferrando (2014) in her research on how the epistemological approaches in AI would impact the futures of gender, discussed the AI being free of the boundaries of gender difference. Namely, the common perspective is that AI operates out of the sexual

paradigm. There is an argument in favour, but is it the answer? Are genderless chatbots the solution?

Kasisto, a company that builds AI software for banks and other financial companies, developed AI (a voiceless chatbot Kai) as non-gender and non-human, that deflects personal questions and does not reflect gender: 'the technology never pretends to be a human and the lines are never blurry' (UNESCO 2019: 120). That specific AI was produced by mostly female designers, intentionally, to avoid making its text output obviously feminine or masculine. Nonetheless, appropriating genderless chatbots *feels* like trying to sweep the inevitable under the carpet: the inescapable reproduction of stereotypes and sexual harassment in both the physical and virtual world.

Education has a key role to play in this process. It is where expectations are forged, and competencies cultivated. Therefore, there is no room for not being interested in it, because AI is now, for everybody.

> Feminist AI = Algorithmic Decision-Making Systems and Artificial Intelligence harnessed to deliver equality outcomes, designed with inclusion at the core, creating new opportunities and proactive, innovative correction of inequities (Feminist AI, 2021).

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Understanding 'Sexting' in Neoconservative (Islamic) Authoritarian Regimes: The Context of Turkey

Didem Şalgam

Summary

The increasing popularity of sexting, a chat-based interactive sexual activity, has gained many scholars' attention, especially in Europe and the US. Initially, sexting has been explained and discussed through a risk framework. However, a growing body of literature has started to approach it from different perspectives questioning its meanings and implications in terms of gender norms, sexuality, and media. In this study, based on 13 in-depth interviews with unmarried heterosexual urbanite young women and men and content analysis of a Turkish online discussion community, I elaborate on the specific motivations for my research participants to practise sexting. Although some of my research findings align with the existing literature in terms of reasons for adults to sext, my discussion makes a significant contribution by introducing new factors that lead a group of people to sext in the context of Turkey, where Islamic authoritarianism has been rising. I argue that norms of *zina* and virginity, preparation for offline sex and passing as a modest subject are among the crucial reasons for my research participants to engage in sexting.

Keywords: sexting, Turkey, gender, sexuality, digital media

Sexting, a portmanteau of 'sex' and 'text,' is a chat-based form of technologically mediated interactive sexual practice. In sexting, two people exchange sexually explicit messages,

photographs, images, and voice recordings via instant texting apps such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, and Snapchat. The main idea of sexting is to arouse sexual feelings and preferably to have sexual pleasure through masturbating. It has gained scholarly and popular attention in the last decade. The preliminary scholarly works on sexting have focused on sexting practices among teenagers and adolescents, discussing the risk factors sexting potentially contains. In other words, scholars from a wide range of disciplines have initially explained sexting as risky behaviour, an epidemic that threatens the well-being of an individual and society, and as addictive behaviour, particularly among adolescents (Drouin, Ross, and Tobin 2015; Englander 2015; Englander and McCoy 2016; Kernsmith, Victor, and Smith-Darden 2018). However, a lot of empirical research has refuted most of the arguments based on the idea of sexting as risky behaviour. For instance, Gordon-Messer and her colleagues' empirical study on sexting among young adults in the context of the US showed that consensual sexting is not associated with risky sexual behaviours such as unprotected sex, and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Gordon-Messer *et al.* 2013).

A wide range of studies, especially in the field of feminist media studies, have discussed sexting in terms of its liberating and objectifying features for women and girls. While a group of feminist works argues that sexting causes the sexual objectification of women and girls (Jewell and Brown 2013; Ringrose *et al.* 2012; Speno and Aubrey 2019), some studies state that sexting practices can provide sexual liberation and subjectification for women and girls (Ferguson 2011; García-Gómez 2017). Although this debate continues, a growing body of literature claims that sexting can be both objectifying and liberating for girls and women, depending on the content and context (Liong and Cheng 2019; Rice and Watson 2016).

Hasinoff carries the discussion beyond the discourses of sexting as risky, objectifying, or liberating, and theorises sexting as 'media production,' which means sexters are the autonomous authors of their sexting contents (Hasinoff 2012). I find her theorisation fruitful for critical thinking because seeing sexters as the author of sexting content – a sextual scenario – resonates with sextual agency. Furthermore, Hasinoff invites scholars to pay attention to how sexting might provide opportunities for girls and young women to explore and express their sexual desires.

Influenced by this call, I have been occupied with the question of how and what kind of meanings and values my research participants attach to sexting in the contemporary context of Turkey. By analysing the meanings and values that my research participants link to sexting practices, I aim to provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of sexting in Turkey, where Islamic authoritarianism with neoliberal policies has been rising. To this end, in what follows, after providing the methodological discussion of my study, I give a contextual background of my analytical discussion by touching upon the Turkish government's intimacy politics and common romantic and sexual practices among unmarried urbanite heterosexual young adults in Turkey. Then, I debate the following questions: what are the reasons for my research participants to sext? What kind of sex(t)ual pleasures do they find in sexting? How do they think sexting provides sexual pleasure and advantages different than offline sex? Through discussing these questions, I believe I will reveal the meanings and values that my research participants attach to sexting.

Methodological discussion: where, whom, and how of the research

My analytical discussion in this study is empirically informed by the findings of my PhD research, in which I study how and to what extent a group of self-identified heterosexual, educated, urbanite, unmarried young adults' sexting practices reshape and are shaped by the commonly accepted offline norms regulating sexual practices in Turkey, minding the current Turkish government (Justice and Development Party, AKP) and Erdoğan Regime's conservative interventionist intimacy politics. I used a hybrid research method for my PhD research, meaning I gathered data from both online and offline field sites between 2019 and 2021. I conducted face-to-face interviews with thirteen self-identified heterosexual, urbanite, unmarried young women and eleven men who had the experience of practicing sexting at least once in the last six months. I used an online recruitment technique to reach out to my research participants. I posted the research participant call on several Facebook groups and pages. I asked my friends to circulate my call by reposting my original post on their own social media accounts. Doing so enabled me to reach out to people with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, religious affiliations, and political views.

My online field site is a Turkish online community, namely *KızlarSoruyor* (Girls are Asking), where the members, both women and men, post questions and comment under very diverse

discussion themes, including but not limited to sexual life and romantic relations.[1] To post a question and make comments, one needs to register and become a member of the community by creating a profile. Furthermore, not all members are allowed to post questions about sexuality-related topics. Instead, a member must be on a certain membership level, which is calculated through a member's interactions (comments and posts). Accordingly, to be able to interact with other members, especially with those actively and regularly posting questions and making comments on sexuality-related topics, I became a member of *KızlarSoruyor*. However, my membership level was initially not high enough to post questions to initiate a discussion related to my research. Therefore, I contacted the administration team and explained why I had joined the community. I asked them to increase my membership level so that I could ask questions and make comments. The administration team kindly agreed to increase my membership level. Afterward, I asked several questions about sexuality-related themes and engaged in discussions with other members. At the end of my field research, I downloaded all the discussion threads regarding sexting on my personal computer. Thus, the data I gathered from *KızlarSoruyor* and my interviews with a group of heterosexual, educated, urbanite, unmarried young adults who practice sexting inform my analytical discussion.

I used discourse analysis as a methodological tool to better understand the meanings and values my research participants attach to their sexting practices. In other words, I analysed the online discussion threads and my interview transcriptions as texts in which the meaning of sexting is reproduced and shared (Tonkiss 1998). I coded my data and identified the main themes that formed the basis of my discussion. While doing so, I paid attention to not only similar patterns but also divergences and variations among my research participants' narratives on their sexting practices in terms of why, with whom, when, and how they sext to provide a more nuanced insight of the meanings and values they attach to their practice (Tonkiss 1988).

Intimacy politics and sexual practices/subjectivities in Turkey

Premarital sexual affairs, especially those of women, have been one of the most burning issues in Turkey from the very beginning of its foundation in the early 1920s. The dominant cultural

[1] To visit *KızlarSoruyor* website: https://www.kizlarsoruyor.com/

practices and beliefs of *namus* (honor), entangled with Islam, have prohibited women's premarital sexual affairs in Turkey (Cindoğlu 2003; Parla 2001). Beginning from childhood, each individual, especially women, learns that women should remain virgins until they get married. Otherwise, they would be a dirty unchaste woman – who is seen as the source of shame for her family. The fear of becoming an object of unhappiness, shame is what prevents most women from exploring their sexual desires and engaging in sexual relationships before marriage.

The limited number of studies on sexual subjectivities in Turkey show that educated urbanite middle-class youth's attitudes toward premarital sex and female virginity have been changing since the late 80s (Kandiyoti and Abadan-Unat 1981; Ozyegin 2015). Educated urbanite middle-class youth is open to having premarital sexual affairs, and they give less value to female virginity. However, this cannot and should not be applied to the whole Turkey; on the contrary, in conservative and small towns, even flirting, kissing, and touching are forbidden, let alone premarital sexual intimacies (Sakallı, Karakurt, and Uğurlu 2012; Sümer 2015; Ş. Yavuz 2015).

The politics of the current Turkish government, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reinforce and revitalise the normative understanding of intimacies and sexually moral subjects in Turkey. AKP and Erdoğan regime's intimacy politics are shaped by the articulation of neoliberal, neoconservative, Islamic, authoritarian, highly patriarchal, heterosexist, and anti-feminist ideologies (Acar and Altunok 2013; Altunok 2016; Baba 2011; Cindoglu and Unal 2017; Coşar and Yeğenoğlu 2011). The neoconservative characteristic of the AKP government has emerged in many public debates on intimate relations, women's bodies, and sexualities during the post-2011 period. On several occasions, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the current President of Turkey and former Prime Minister, has explicitly declared his patriarchal and anti-woman position with reference to Islamic values and the Ottoman Empire. The public debates AKP initiated range from abortion, marital decisions of women, through motherhood, co-ed (on/off campus) housing of university students to birth control, all of which directly target women's bodies, their sexualities, and sexual intimacies. AKP has also promoted sex segregation in public spheres by an appeal to the Ottoman Empire, which they see as their historical legacy (Kandiyoti 2015).

Furthermore, Islamic authoritarianism reflects on AKP's public political debates and their violent attacks on oppositional views/figures and alternative/non-normative ways of living. Intolerance for oppositional views, social movements, and the freedom of speech, intervention in alternative lifestyles such as alcohol consumption, marital decisions, dress code, especially that of women, attacks on co-ed housing of university students, and restrictions on abortion with reference to Islamic values exemplify the Islamic authoritarian character of AKP well. Accordingly, the current Turkish government produces and circulates a very normative and oppressive understanding of sexual morality to regulate the sexual behaviours of individuals, especially those of youth, women, and non-conforming gender/sexual identities.

However, the 'new Turkey' that the AKP government wildly strives to engineer is incompatible with the demands, expectations, and desires of individuals, especially those of educated urbanite youth in Turkey (Özkazanç 2018; Ozyegin 2015). Recent empirical studies on young unmarried adults, mostly university students, showed that attitudes of young adults toward women's premarital sexual affairs and the meaning of virginity stray from the dominant norms of gender and sexuality. However, as I indicated earlier, the change in the value given to virginity and in the attitudes toward women's premarital sexual intimacies does not present a homogenous picture of Turkey. It does not correspond to the major discourse. Nevertheless, the normative value given to virginity and sexual morality stands as the most significant obstacle for young women to explore and experience their sexualities.

Since major discourses on sexuality and intimacies do not correspond to the desires and lifestyles of educated urbanite youth, they seek ways of coping with the conservative and Islamic authoritarian regime of AKP to actualise their ideal gender and sexuality practices (*Ibidem*). Gül Ozyegin, a feminist scholar, in her recent work on sexual selves and subjectivities of Turkish youth, uses the concept of 'façade' to explain how young adults, especially women, have developed multiple personas to cope with the contradictions between their desires versus the expectations of their parents and the authoritarian regime (Ozyegin 2015). Among the many façades, it is through 'virginal façades' that young unmarried women seem to act in accordance with social expectations: they technically remain a virgin as expected by society while engaging in sexual intimacies in their sexual relationships (Ibid., 47). Therefore, on the one hand, we have an increasing religiosity, conservatism,

and Islamisation, and on the other hand, democratic demands, secularism, individualisation, women and LGBTQ movement and changing gender roles (Özkazanç 2018). Within this socio-cultural and political atmosphere of Turkey, in new Turkey, I am trying to understand the meanings and values attached to the practice of sexting.

The motivations for practising sexting

The motives of individuals, especially of adolescents, to engage in sexting have been widely discussed. Scholarly works in the field have suggested that exploring sexuality, expressing sexual intimacy, sustaining a romantic relationship, and demonstrating love and trust to a partner in a romantic relationship (Van Ouytsel *et al.* 2018), initiating offline sexual relationship (Bianchi *et al*. 2017), and sexually pleasing a partner and enhancing the romantic relationship (Drouin and Tobin 2014; Weisskirch and Delevi 2011) are the main reasons for consensual sexting. Notably, against the vast literature arguing that young adults and adolescents, especially women and girls, engage in sexting, a growing body of scholarship has shown that coercion and pressure are not among the highly reported motivations for individuals to practise sexting (Englander 2012; Lee and Crofts 2015: 464).

All of my research participants stated that they practise sexting willingly. In other words, partner pressure and coercion were not the reasons for my research participants to engage in sexting with their significant others. My research findings mainly support the above-mentioned reasons for sexting such as sustaining a relationship, flirting, looking for sexual pleasure in a long-distance relationship, and initiating offline sex However, due to the peculiar socio-cultural and political context of my research, I also have new and complementary findings that have not been scholarly discussed (at least to my knowledge) up to date in the field of sexting discussions. My analysis of the online discussions occurred on *KızlarSoruyor,* and my interviews with a group of heterosexual, unmarried, educated young women and men suggest that the virginity norms, getting prepared for offline sex, and passing as a modest subject in society are among the main reasons for my research participants to practice sexting.

Norms of zina and virginity

As I have mentioned earlier, the issue of virginity works as a disciplinary power regulating sexual practices, especially those of

women. Although the value attached to virginity has decreased among urbanite educated youth over the years, it is still among the factors preventing a group of youth from engaging in sexual intercourse (Ozyegin 2015). In my field research I have observed that many heterosexual women and a smaller number of men, especially Muslims, explore and experience their sexual desires, abstaining from penile-vaginal intercourse.[2] These women and men understand and explain the value of virginity through its socio-cultural consequences and Islamic norms; therefore, *zina*, the act of engaging in a sexual relationship outside wedlock. In this particular study, I use *zina* to refer to premarital sexual behaviours due to the scope of my research. Islam strictly forbids *zina* and commands Muslims to remain virgins until marriage. Zuhal, a young, veiled Muslim woman and a research participant who studies theology at a university level, explained how norms of *zina* regulate her sexual practices in this way:

> *Premarital sex is forbidden in Islam. It confuses the familial linkage. I mean, it cannot be certain who is whose kid. Sexual diseases would increase. There would be moral problems in society. Therefore, there are specific reasons why Islam forbids premarital sex. I don't incline toward premarital sex. I engage in sexual relations, but I avoid sexual intercourse because it has serious consequences, which I just mentioned, like pregnancy, sexual disease and so on. And these bring along serious moral responsibilities. For these reasons, I avoid sexual intercourse.* (Interview with Zuhal, 2021)[3]

The norms of *zina* and virginity regulate Zuhal's sexual practices in a way that she abstains from sexual intercourse in her offline sexual relationships. The main reason for Zuhal to remain a virgin while experiencing her sexual desires is to avoid the 'serious consequences', such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases that offline premarital sexual intercourse might cause.

Although virginity norms unproportionally target women's sexualities, I have also come across and interviewed Muslim men who abstain from penile-vaginal intercourse and wish to remain virgins until they get married. For instance, Karaboyy, a 26-year-old

[2] To prevent any misunderstanding, I feel an urge to put a note here: I do not problematise this form of sexual practice. Instead, what I consider problematic is the virginity norms putting pressure on women's sexual practices and subjectivities.

[3] To protect the identities of my research participants I use pseudonyms.

and man-identified member of *KızlarSoruyor*, commented on my post asking, 'what are the reasons for you to sext?' Karaboyy spends a significant amount of time on the *KızlarSoruyor*, as understood from his membership level on his profile. He commented, 'Because I am a virgin' as a reply to my post. I sent a private message to Karaboyy through the messaging facility on *KızlarSoruyor* to ask further questions and gain a better insight into his perception of virginity and sexting.[4] He told me he is a Muslim and a devout believer, following the Sunni sect of Islamic doctrines. Therefore, Islamic norms on sexuality are the main reason for him to avoid offline sexual affairs. When I asked Karaboyy to tell me more about his views regarding premarital offline sex, he wrote:

> *Zina is a huge sin. Allah (God) forbids it. But everyone is doing it these days. Even I, a strong believer, hardly keep my control not to do it. I will wait until I get married. … Virginity is very important for me. As I said, I will wait until I get married.* (Chat-based interview with Karaboyy, 2019)

As the quote demonstrates, Karaboyy does not involve in offline sexual relationships as he, like many other devout Muslims, thinks Islam forbids *zina*, engaging in premarital sex. He attaches a significant value to his virginity, so he wishes to 'wait until (I) get married.' As I will discuss further, his religiosity, the importance of virginity and norms of *zina,* prevents him from engaging in offline sex, but not sexting. In this regard, Karaboyy differs from my other pious research participants because they tend to experience offline sexuality within certain limits, as I have shown in the case of Zuhal.

Unlike Karaboyy and similar to Zuhal, Erman, a male research participant with a religious social, educational and familial upbringing background, avoids sexual intercourse in his offline sexual relationships due to his religious values. When I inquired how and what he thinks about *zina* and virginity, Erman said that:

> *There are certain limits in sexual relationships. I do not transgress these boundaries because of societal values and my Islamic belief. I don't find it appropriate to experience sexual things, which I would be doing in my marriage life, in premarital sex due to Islamic norms. I mean that I think foreplay up to a certain level is not a huge norm for me. It is something I practice. But the*

[4] I explained to him that I communicated with him for my research and will be using his responses as data in my research.

> *next level is not okay for me. I am talking about sexual penetration. It has important and particular consequences. … I think there must be certain limits.*
> (Interview with Erman, 2021)

By 'certain limits' in sexual relations, Erman implicitly refers to sexual intercourse. He avoids engaging in sexual intercourse, although he practises premarital sex with his partners. By abstaining from sexual intercourse, he actually protects his and his partners' states of virginity, as virginity is mainly associated with the (lack of) penile-vaginal intercourse. Like Zuhal, Erman also addresses the societal consequences of sexual intercourse. Gül Özyeğin has introduced the concept of 'virginal façades' to explain how a group of young unmarried, educated women in Turkey protects their hymen, their virginity, by abstaining from sexual intercourse in their offline sexual affairs (Özyeğin 2009, 2015). Although Özyeğin used the concept to analyse women's sexual behaviours, I think it can also be applied to pious men's sexual practices, as Erman's case demonstrates.

When it comes to sexting, however, the offline limits of sexual practices are extended or transgressed because the immateriality of sexting provides a sex(t)ual experience in which individuals may enjoy sexual pleasure without physical/material interactions. Scholars working in the field of cybersex have argued that the premise of cybersex is transcending the body and moving to an imaginary and animative sphere. From this perspective, digitally mediated sex, cybersex in general, is theorised as immaterial, beyond the material life, because it lacks the flesh of the sex partners and is imaginary (Eerikäinen 2012). For, materiality is commonly understood as an artefact and practise (Gillespie, Boczkowski, and Foot 2014) that can be *bodily* sensed and used (my emphasis). The lack of face-to-face and physical interaction, immateriality, has been identified as among the most alluring factors that attract people to be involved in sexting and cybersex in general. The practitioners of sexting may benefit from the anonymity and immateriality of sexting for several ends. For instance, it may allow shy people to express their feelings, mostly erotic and sexual ones, to their sext partners (Carvalheira and Gomes 2003). It may also provide a 'free' and 'safe' space to its participants, especially to women, eliminating the risks that might arise from sexual contact, such as violence and unwanted pregnancy (Daneback, Cooper, and Månsson 2005).

The immateriality of sexting, or the lack of bodily interaction at the same time and place, enables my research participants to go beyond the offline limits of *zina* and virginity norms.

> *I have never had sex but sexting. I think sexting is sinful as well but must be less sinful.*
> (Chat-based Interview with Karaboyy, 2019)

The norms of *zina* and virginity prevent Karaboyy from experiencing offline sex and exploring his sexual desires in offline life. However, the immateriality of sexting opens a space for him to engage in sexual affairs because he thinks sexting might 'be less sinful' and may not be considered as *zina* compared to offline sex. Alara, a pious woman research participant, shares a similar view and explains well why sexting may 'be less sinful'.

> *If it is only texting, I mean, if there is no voice recordings and pictures. I mean if you don't show your body and yourself, then it is not zina and not a sin. Also, you don't touch someone else and no one is touching your body.*
> (Interview with Alara, 2019)

In Alara's quote, there is another criterion for *zina* to occur in sexting: the presence or absence of 'voice recordings and pictures'. Sharing 'voice recordings and pictures' or representing their bodies through images leads to the materialisation of bodies that are sexting. Therefore, in the account of Alara, *zina* occurs when sexual desires and pleasures are enacted through the material bodies and materialisation of bodies which might be realised through sharing one's images and voices. Besides, Alara addresses the lack of material and embodied sexual interaction of desiring and desirable bodies in sexting by saying, 'you don't touch someone else, and no one is touching your body'. Accordingly, the immateriality of – the lack of the bodies' material sexual interaction in – sexting provides a sexual context in which the norms of *zina* are challenged.

Preparation for offline sex

Some of my research participants had not had an offline sexual experience when I conducted the interviews, not because of their religious values, the norms of *zina,* and virginity. Instead, they did not feel ready for offline sex. The feeling of being not ready for offline sex originates from the lack of sexual experience and sexual education: not knowing what and how to do things during

sex. For instance, Bülent, a 24-year-old man, told me that he had not had an offline sexual relationship, although he had romantic relationships and practised sexting.

> *I haven't experienced sex yet. I see it as a process. So, I think it is not time yet for me. I had a girlfriend before, and we were together for six months, but I didn't feel ready. I want to know the person well before having sex: feeling that we're compatible and suitable not just mentally but also physically. I didn't know whether she would like it.*
> (Interview with Bülent, 2019)

Bülent is one of the few research participants who had not had an offline sexual experience other than sexting. In his understanding, he needs some time to get to know his partner well enough to have sex. The period of time that he needs to feel ready to have offline sex with his partner is not determined. He also told me that he shared a bed with his partner, but they did not touch each other as he did not feel ready for offline sex. The very reason why he did not feel ready for offline sex, as I mentioned earlier, originates with his performance anxiety. A wide range of literature in the field of masculinity has discussed the anxieties and insecurities men experience regarding their sexuality and sex life. Young adult men are afraid of failing to give sexual pleasure to their sex partners and facing 'sexual inadequacy' because of their sexual performance, especially in their first sexual encounters (Hyde *et al.* 2009: 244). The dominant discourse of masculinity requires young men to know what to do in sex even though they lack experience and sex education. Due to these contradictory masculinity expectations, young men tend to postpone their offline sex as much as possible, as in the case of Bülent. The sexual insecurity that Bülent experienced manifests itself in his statement, 'I didn't know whether she would like it.' For, as previous research has shown, men's failure to sexually please a woman is understood as a failure of masculinity among young men (Khan *et al.* 2008; Sweeney 2014). This normative construction of heterosexual masculinity creates particular sexual anxieties among adolescent boys and young men as they are expected to achieve mastery in pleasuring women (Sweeney 2014). In this respect, Bülent engages in sexting practices to overcome his anxieties and insecurities because he thinks he will gain sexual experience and knowledge through sexting.

> *I had sexual desires toward my partner back then, but I wasn't ready. Because I thought she wouldn't like it or*

> *wouldn't be happy. I wasn't ready for sex, because not being able to sexually satisfy her would sadden me. So we did sexting. For me, sexting is a rehearsal of sex. In sexting, you fictionalise the things that you would be doing in sex: I will do this first, then I will touch there and so on. You would become ready for sex through sexting as you get to know what you would be doing in sex.*
> (Interview with Bülent, 2019)

The lack of sexual knowledge and experience made Bülent have sexual performance anxiety which he thinks he would overcome by practising sexting. Sexting would give him a certain degree of knowledge regarding what he would be doing in sex to please a woman. Accordingly, sexting functions as a tool to achieve sexual mastery to 'get ready' for offline sex, especially for those who feel the anxiety of failing in 'good sex'.

Passing as a modest subject in society

The post-2011 period of Turkey has witnessed several shaking socio-political events across the country as an outcome of the increasing (Islamic) authoritarian undemocratic governmentality characterised by heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies. In their mediated connection with the affective political discourses produced by AKP and the Erdoğan Regime, these socio-political events have gradually transformed the general public into a more interventionist and conservative unity. This transformation has been in line with the imagined society and subject that AKP and the Erdoğan Regime have been eager to construct in accord with the so-called Sunni Islamic Turkish values. The notions of faithfulness, docility, obedience, piety, chastity, and modesty characterise the figure of this imagined society and subject. That also means that the AKP and the Erdoğan Regime have tried to re-write the ideal lifestyle and practices on the grounds of Sunni-Islamic rules through its institutions (H. Yavuz and Öztürk 2019). Accordingly, this imagined ideal subject composing the imagined society should not transgress the so-called Sunni Islamic doctrines and the rule of AKP and the Erdoğan Regime, which is the integral component of neoconservative governance because it wishes to have subjects who are religiously moral and submissive to state authority and hierarchical relations in society.

It appears in the narratives of most of my interviewees that a group of young adults, especially women, had been facing a burden resulting from being affected by AKP's politics and the

general atmosphere. In their accounts, these burdens caused them to have an unpleasant feeling in 'freely' going out, going to bars at night, drinking, and dating/hooking up, bringing a partner to their home. Accordingly, these burdens, at the end of the day, had a considerable impact on the romantic, sexual, intimate lives of my research participants. For instance, Çağla, a woman participant, expressed that the increasing conservatisation of the public has led her to change how she, as a young woman, appears in this conservatized public in the last couple of years. She particularly said that she refrains from being flirty, touchy, and sexually provocative in the streets and bars because she is afraid of how other people would react, especially after seeing news reporting that people attacked couples kissing in the street. Çağla mentioned that the fear of how people would respond in the public domain is one of the reasons for her to practise sexting. When I asked her to explain how she uses sexting in this respect, she said that:

> *So, let's say I'm going out to meet my friends and potential guys who I already know, and I want to have sex. While I'm dressing up, getting prepared before the meeting, I start sending them messages like you know, sexually provoking messages. Then I follow up with the one who replies nicely and whom I like more. We exchange arousing messages until we meet up. It's heating up things. So in a way, I kind of make sure that some attraction between us happens, and we're going to have sex, and we will leave the bar together.*
> (Interview with Çağla, 2019)

At the very first glance, this quote evidences that Çağla uses sexting for 'heating things up' with the intention of having sexual interaction at the end of the day. In this respect, it supports the emerging literature that suggests that sexting can be used for sexual arousal and sexual intimacy (Dobson 2015; Hasinoff 2012). However, when her use of sexting is contextualised within the change of her practises due to the increasing conservatism, it becomes more complicated than just seeking a sexual interaction. To follow up and dig in, I asked Çağla how and to what extent her use of sexting to 'heat things up' could be related to her abstaining from being flirty and touchy in particular public areas such as streets or some bars. She paused for a couple of seconds and then replied: 'probably yes, yes. I didn't think about it before, but now when you asked.' Hence, it was clear for me that Çağla wants to

continue to be a flirty and sexually active young woman, but at the same time, she wishes not to put herself in a dangerous and risky situation by revealing her active sexual subject to the public through being flirty and touchy.

Ilkay also had similar feelings and experiences regarding the impacts of increasing Islamic conservatisation in Turkey in the last decade.

> *The ever-increasing conservatism has gradually restricted my clubbiness, sociability, and my realm of freedom. … I am not initiative in my bilateral romantic relations anymore. Especially after July 15, I had started to be more careful about what I am wearing at school, what I am saying, whom I am seeing, you know all these things. It was scary. My sexual life used to be more active. I remember there were several guys, coming and going, in my life, I mean to my place. But now it has changed. Because I am afraid that they [the school administration] will notice that I have a sex life. They shouldn't know, learn this…. I am using sexting, but not the people that I know. I have fake accounts on Facebook and some online game platforms, I meet guys online and sext with them.*
> (Interview with Ilkay, 2019)

Ilkay, like many other research participants, especially unmarried young women, has started self-disciplining, making her intimate life and practices 'invisible' to others because of the escalating surveillance and blacklisting as well as the increasing interventionist conservatism of the social public. The immateriality of sexting provides a space where many people explore and experience their sexual desires in a way that is invisible to the general conservative public. This invisible aspect of sexting enables some of my research participants, like İlkay and Çağla, to pass as modest subjects in a conservative society. In other words, I argue that digitally mediated materiality of sexting enables a group of young individuals, especially unmarried young adults who have felt restricted by the AKP's politics, to hide their sexual subjectivities and practises while pursuing their sexual desires.

Conclusion

Previous studies have widely elaborated on the motivations for adults and teenagers to practise sexting in Anglo-Saxon countries. These studies found that among these motivations are low self-esteem, anxiety attachment (Weisskirch and Delevi 2011), peer

pressure, attention-seeking, fun, boredom, maintaining a long-distance relationship (Walker, Sanci, and Temple-Smith 2013), performing sexiness, flirting (Reed *et al.* 2020), sexualization (of culture) (Hasinoff 2014), pursuing sexual desire and initiating sexual interaction (Dobson 2015), and means of a joke (Burkett 2015).

My interviews and the online data I gathered from *KızlarSoruyor* support and complement these studies and their findings. However, in this study, I have discussed the specific reasons for my research participants to practise sexting to reveal the meanings and values they attach to sexting in the socio-political context of Turkey, where Islamic authoritarianism and conservatism have been rising. I have debated how increasing Islamic authoritarianism, and conservatism entangled with the norms of *zina* and virginity shape the sexual practices of my research participants. I argue that some of my research participants – heterosexual, unmarried, urbanite young women and men – practise sexting to deal with the norms of *zina* and virginity, gain sexual experience and pass as modest subjects in the context of Turkey. Further research in different socio-cultural and political contexts may come up with disparate meanings and values attached to sexting.

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The Woman and the Feminine on the Web – A Comparative Analysis of Three Croatian Web Portals

Iva Rogulja Praštalo

Summary

Ever since its beginning in the late 19th century, the feminist movement has always depended on the support of the media, specifically on the mass media's ability to inform, inspire and empower women all over the world. Nevertheless, this collaboration has not always been as fruitful as it may seem. While some mass media have been supportive of feminist ideas, others have used their influence to undermine and demean the idea of gender equality, depicting feminists as women who belittle and demonise men and are altogether misandrists. However, the shift from mass media to new media, such as social networking and the Web, has liberated the media space and blurred the line between the producer and the consumer of media content. In other words, the power to form public opinion has finally been entrusted to those who earlier were silenced and marginalised – amongst others, women. This paper will focus on three Croatian web portals (and their accompanying Facebook pages) primarily aimed at female readers: neoconservative Catholic portal *Žena vrsna* ('Fine/Capable Woman'), consumerist and superficial portal *Zadovoljna.hr* (loosely translated as 'Satisfied/Content Woman'), and feminist portal *VoxFeminae*. By analysing content of the three web portals, as well as the number of 'followers,' 'likes' and 'shares' of their articles, I will try to draw conclusions about the prevailing social climate concerning gender equality and female rights in Croatia.

Keywords: feminism, new media, feminine on the Web, Catholic extremism, consumerism

Ever since the women's rights movement first became organised in the late 19th century, its success has closely depended on the support of the media. Organised guerrilla actions and protests all over the UK and USA might have remained small, local riots if it wasn't for mass media support, which has inspired and empowered millions of women worldwide to embrace feminist ideas and rebel against oppression. Paradoxically, the same media is to blame for the great public disapproval of feminism; while some mass media have been supportive of feminist ideas, others have used their influence to undermine and demean the idea of gender equality, depicting feminists as women who belittle and demonise men and are altogether misandrists. More than a hundred years after English suffragette Emily Davison lost her life to a horse while protesting during the Epsom Derby race (thereby becoming known as a feminist martyr or, depending on one's viewpoint, 'radical madwoman'), attitudes towards women's rights and feminist ideas have not changed that much. Although most societies have accepted their right to vote and actively participate in the labour market and political sphere, being a woman still bears substantial challenges. Hidden under the name of postfeminism (the apparently optimistic idea that gender equality and female rights have been attained long ago and therefore feminism is, in a modern society, redundant), there has been a subtle rise in new media conservatism. Thanks to 'postfeminism,' the iron cage of gender repression has not yet been broken or thrown out, but instead has been merely painted gold with a splash of glitter all over it so it would seem more appealing. Sure, you have the right to vote and be politically active, but try not to be too loud; freely exercise your right to work and have a successful career, but make sure you become a mother as well; feel free to do whatever you want with your body, but remember that life begins at the moment of conception and having an abortion is, of course, murder; embrace your sexuality, but make sure you do not provoke or attract too much attention… General systems of values in which woman and female still combine a number of mutually contradictory attributes put women in a somewhat perplexing situation, offering them a choice between freedom which might provoke public condemnation, and conformism which will possibly lead to a sense of personal defeat or even depression.

Yet, a real culprit for this situation is still to be found. This complex state of affairs might be a result of inadequate reference models

(and often confusing messages) given to us through mass media, but this unfavourable image of the woman in the media could also be a mere reflection of reality. Therefore, the real question is: does mass media authentically represent modern women, their needs, and their stand on feminism, or is the picture they are painting heavily distorted? To what extent can the average woman relate to her media image? The answer might lie in the new media, such as social networks and the Web, which have liberated the media space and blurred the line between the producer of media content and its consumer. Finally, the reader/viewer is not merely a recipient of a media message, but an interlocutor actively participating in an exchange of views. In other words, in the era of postmodernist democracy and radical decentralisation (Poster, 1997: 205), the power to form public opinion by immediate response to a certain media message has finally been entrusted to those who were earlier silenced and marginalised: amongst others, women. But how are women exercising their right to create media content?

This paper will focus on three Croatian web portals (and their accompanying Facebook pages) primarily aimed at female readers: neoconservative Catholic portal *Žena vrsna* (Fine/Capable Woman), consumerist and superficial *Zadovoljna.hr* (loosely translated as 'Satisfied/Content Woman') and feminist portal *VoxFeminae*.

Radical media democratisation as a tool for self-promotion

To fully understand the reason why the digital format of this content 'for women' – as well as its presence on social media – is so crucial for reaching its full potential, a few words should be said about the difference between mass media, communication media, and new media. In its most general sense, a medium is defined as 'a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment'[1] and is therefore closely linked to a society. Ever since the invention of Gutenberg's letterpress, printed texts have taken priority over the spoken word. Compared to oral literature, print had a much wider reach, and the message it was trying to deliver was more permanent; written text was no longer just a means of entertainment but contained important information about the real world around us as well. Moreover, daily newspapers and magazines have offered their readers an exclusive 'window' into

[1] Available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medium (accessed 1 November 2023).

the world, specifically to the spheres of reality they might never (due to their social or economic status) be able to see without it. Radio and television have taken this a step further. Not only has the delivery of messaging become much easier, but its senders have *entered* the homes of anybody who was willing to turn on their radio or TV. Even if some of the listeners and viewers were not actively participating in a certain programme, the fact that a single message has simultaneously been broadcast to several millions of people has given them a (false) sense of inclusion.

However, this illusion cannot survive for very long; no matter how elaborate it might be, it cannot hide the fact that communication through mass media is almost always unilateral. Except for quite rare call-in radio shows which provide real-time communication between a host and a listener/viewer, both radio and TV are primarily focused on *sending* the message, usually addressed to an audience of a shared interest willing to acclaim it, or at least passively accept it without much thought. As media theorist Lev Manovich points out: 'logic of old media corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society' in which 'everybody was supposed to enjoy the same goods – and to have the same beliefs' (Manovich 1999: 15). Conversely, new media such as the internet are based on the presumption of the recipient's individuality, and therefore insist on creating highly personalised content tailored to the needs/interests of a concrete individual. In this post-industrial society, 'every citizen can construct her own custom lifestyle and 'select' her ideology from a large (but not infinite) number of choices and react to a certain content by changing it or commenting about it on one of many available social networks' (*Ibidem*).

Although this kind of bilateral communication has been possible since the invention of the telephone and telegraph, these two devices were lacking an important component – mass outreach. The first form of mass media which has overcome this limitation is the Web. As Katarina Peović Vuković points out:

> The Web is a first medium which is a communicational and a mass medium at the same time. The Web is a mass medium for the massive reach of its messages and audience, but it is at the same time a communicational channel which enables its user to communicate directly without the central hub intercession' (Peović Vuković 2012: 78).

The prerogative of political and economic centres for mass transmission of messages and information suddenly got into the

hands of every internet user, and radical democratisation made sure that all the previously silenced voices got their chance to be heard. This should have been a first step to enormous social progress. But was it so?

The answer depends on the perspective from which we look at the problem. If technological sceptics are to be asked, the quality of our lives devolved precisely *because* of the great technological advancement. Yes, we got a chance to 'see the world' (or just voyeuristically peek behind our neighbour's closed door), but we are living in a time when nothing can remain hidden, no matter how personal or sacred it may be. Our wish to communicate with the world naturally puts us in a situation where we are also the objects of someone's communication, but rapid technological progress has radically dehumanised this process while adding to it a devastating sense of permanence. A moment frozen in time by a photographer, or a short conversation caught on camera has, because of this technological prosthesis, already lost some of the context necessary for its understanding but posting it on social networks has completely blurred the message it was communicating in the first place. Taken out of context, this media content becomes available to everybody (or, at least, to a very liberally chosen group of online 'friends') and can easily be manipulated. Even a profile owner herself consciously *chooses* what to post on her wall and when, thereby changing and upgrading an original message. Furthermore, by a postmodern act of abolishing any chronology and hierarchy, a single 'user profile' can within minutes offer us a photograph of yesterday's lunch, video footage of a childbirth and a call for a donation to a promising start-up, while the only criterion for value assessment is the number of 'clicks' under each post.

However, it would be unjust to presume that the blame for this devaluation of values, as the technological sceptics like to imply, lies only with a technological breakthrough. The sense that we are constantly being monitored comes from the fact that we ourselves *like* to observe others, and by reciprocity, *want/need* to be observed by them. Moreover, it is precisely by this act of common acting and speaking that the public sphere (as an environment crucial for the formation of one's own identity) is formed (Arendt 1991: 160). As the signatories of a modern version of the social contract, we have waived our rights to an absolute undisturbed privacy, but this act has granted us a new and exciting type of power. By agreeing to exhibit a part of our intimacy in a social media 'showroom' we have gained a privilege of self-creation, that is, a

chance to create our own 'online persona' who may be exposed to a constant voyeuristic view of others, but we certainly will not tolerate it without a thick layer of heavy stage make-up. In the words of José van Dijck:

> Roughly after 2009, the self-turned into an object of marketing and promotion now that connectivity could transform online social value to real rewards in the offline world. (…) Celebrities' self-presentation via Twitter or Facebook exposes the lucrative side of the connective turn: their online personas equal their *brands*, and the ultimate successful presentation of self is to have millions of followers. From Justin Bieber to Barack Obama, *online personas* have become an indispensable part of self-branding. (Van Dijck 2013: 202, italics my own)

Does that mean that technology has changed even our own understanding of ourselves? A mere glimpse at the literature on communication proves that cannot be so. In early 1956, almost thirty years before the simplest versions of social networks emerged, sociologist Erving Goffman, in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, writes about a human tendency to 'perform' when communicating with others, naming a multitude of subtle conscious and unconscious signals and techniques one uses to project a desirable image, that is, to 'safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others' (Goffman 1956: 7). In that context, technology is merely a tool which enables the manifestation of human nature, precisely meeting the needs which most humans had long before the occurrence of shiny technological devices. Technology has, almost like some giant spotlight, shed light on the darkest corners of human society, but it would be wrong to blame it for the existence of all the creepy little monsters which came crawling out from the dark. Moreover, social deviations and moral monstrosities are not a result of 'demonical' technology but an immanent part of certain human individuals. However, the real question is not 'Who is responsible for their emergence?' or even 'Should they have ever stepped out from the darkness?' but 'How will society react to their visibility now that they have entered the spotlight?' In other words, how will the marginal affect and change the central now that the former has become a legitimate part of the latter?

Žena vrsna – conservative views in liberal media

The feminist movement has inspired social changes which have brought the woman and the feminine closer to the privileged

centre of attention, trying to redefine the term 'feminine' and re-evaluate gender roles inscribed in it by centuries of patriarchy. Although the general democratisation and liberalisation of a society has resulted in much clearer definitions of human and specifically women's rights, it is unrealistic to expect that the course and extent of personal and social growth will be the same for everyone. A valuable insight into what happens when a society accomplishes 'freedom from,' but an individual is still too immature to exercise 'freedom for,' is given to us by the web portal *Žena vrsna*—dragocjenija od bisera (loosely translated as "Fine/Capable Woman—more precious than a pearl").

As the two editors-in-chief explain, this is the 'first Croatian portal for Catholic women' which has originated from 'a Novena of Holy Spirit and an attempt to discover a true biblical woman.'[2] The main idea of this web portal[3] is to 'encourage ourselves and our dear readers to be fine women when it comes to preservation of marriage, raising of children, careful home decorating or choosing clothes which will testify God's harmony.' Indeed, after just a few 'clicks,' this modern-looking portal (in a technological sense) will open a gate to a world 'inspired by an Old Testament vision of a fine woman.'[4] In five sections named *Faith, Motherhood, Day By Day, Between Us* and *The Column*, this portal creates a platform for the representation of real, 'fine women'[5] who by their own example testify to the 'beauty of the holy road on which they willingly take their crosses onto their backs, happy to be walking along the path set by the Blessed Virgin Mary.' Furthermore, the eight editors, all of whom are women, have (in an apostolic manner) truly given up everything to serve Christ. However, their service is somewhat unusual. Although university-educated, these

[2] Quotation is a part of editor's text called *About us* https://zenavrsna.com/o-nama. All the following quotations will be linked to a specific article on the web portal *Žena vrsna*.

[3] As the research by Pew Research Center conducted in 2014 states: 'religious engagement through TV, radio, music and the internet generally complements – rather than replaces – traditional kinds of religious participation.' Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/11/06/religion-and-electronic-media/ accessed 5 November 2023).

[4] Here is the editor`s definition of a *fine woman*: 'Fine woman is more precious than a pearl. The heart of her husband can trust her without any fear, she always does good by him. She works skilfully and tirelessly on a Lord's field, seeking God's will and always doing so. There is no fear in her, except for the fear of God, so she smiles each day enjoying the fruits of her deeds." Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/4-nacina-izraziti-radost-braku/7274

[5] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/o-nama (accessed 1 November 2023).

women have given up their potential careers (and even everyday jobs!) so that they could become full-time stay-at-home-mums![6] As one of the former[7]the editor, Marija Grgić, puts it: 'Earlier in life I obtained a master's degree in mathematics and physics but then God provided me with a husband and blessed our marriage with five children.'[8] As a result, she proudly proclaims: 'I now take care of my family and edit *Žena vrsna,* which fills me with grace on a daily basis.' The stories and CVs of other editors and authors are similar to hers; Suzana Džeko traded her master's degree in computer science for a 'career as a stay-at-home mums and deeply loves it,'[9] university psychologist and FEMM[10] educator Lea Čorić describes herself as a 'wife of a caring and promising young Dalmatian,'[11] and Katarina Matijaca is 'proud to be married to the best husband in the world with whom she raises (for now) eight children.'[12] When she is not busy taking care of her children and family home, she can be found 'reading, writing and crocheting!'[13]

The sense that these might be characters from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* gets even stronger after reading some of the articles posted on this Catholic portal. Along with articles aimed towards, as Pamela Jo Brubaker and Michel M. Haigh put it, 'actively reaching out to others by sharing faith-based information, messages, or beliefs that inspire, encourage, and uplift others; ministering to the spiritual and emotional needs of others by helping those who have lost their faith, those who are struggling with their faith, or those in need of spiritual guidance' (Brubaker & Haigh 2017: 5), there are articles designed to promote an idea of a biblical 'fine woman,' and she is, without exception, closely tied to her home. Just as the optimistic theories of Raymond Williams and Marshall McLuhan suggest, technology

[6] For more on the difference in usage of the nouns *mother* and *mum* see: Douglas, S. J., & Michaels, M. W. (2004). *The mommy myth: The idealization of motherhood and how it has undermined all women.* New York: Free Press. According to the authors noun 'mum' is often used in a positive context (e.g. *soccer mums, stay-at-home mums*), while the noun 'mother' often refers to something pejorative or at least neutral (e.g. *working mothers, welfare mothers*).

[7] The list of editors has recently got shorter, thus Marija Grgić is no longer an editor but is still a rather active author on this web portal.

[8] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/author/marija (accessed 27 October 2023)

[9] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/author/suza (accessed 5 November 2023)

[10] Fertility Education and Medical Management (Available at: https://www.instagram.com/femm_cro/?hl=hr, accessed 5 November 2023).

[11] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/author/leap (accessed 30 October 2023).

[12] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/author/katarina (accessed 30 October 2023).

[13] Ibid.

has not intervened in society; it has only offered a technical aid for the realisation of the social needs that were there in the first place. Specifically, it has offered a platform for the re-popularisation (or preservation) of a dominantly patriarchal social environment in which a woman's natural role is that of a child-bearer and a home keeper. As one of the articles states, 'Stay-At-Home Mums Are Not Housewives!'[14] because 'Being a Stay-At-Home Mum Is a Career Choice.'[15] Furthermore, the editors are asking 'Will a Woman Bury All of Her Talents by Staying at Home?'[16] and 'Why Do You Need a Degree if You Are Going To Stay at Home?'[17] only to state that 'all the knowledge gained while getting a degree will prove useful when you find yourself surrounded by curious little creatures.'[18]

As Denise Renner, author of an article titled 'I Was Looking for Freedom and I Found It in My Own Home'[19] (originally taken from the web portal Catholic Exchange), assures us: 'all of your motivational speeches will become more sophisticated and even brilliant because they will not be spoken under the fluorescent light of an office, but during the Holy Mass.'[20] In that manner, Renner claims that she has, by quitting her job, found her true happiness and can proudly say 'I am free — to love in abundance and sacrifice for the least of these: the unborn child in the womb and the crying ones in my arms.'[21] Even if the reader on the conscious level overlooks an obvious (and pretentious) reference to Kant's 'the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me' (Kant 2015: 129), the subliminal message will remain clear – insisting on a career (or, at least, a job outside the family home!) is a pointless and greedy pursuit of money, and her need for time away from the family is just a selfish lack of will to sacrifice for her own children.

However, staying at home and being a good mother is simply not enough. As *Žena vrsna* teaches its readers, women must be

[14] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/mame-kod-kuce-nisu-kucanice/9866 (accessed 5 November 2023).

[15] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/mama-kod-kuce-izabrana-karijera/2760 (accessed 30 October 2023).

[16] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/zena-zakopati-talente-kod-kuce-djecom/13666 (accessed 5 November 2023).

[17] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/sto-ce-diploma-ces-ostati-kod-kuce/9640 (accessed 3 November 2023).

[18] Ibid.

[19] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/trazila-sam-slobodu-i-pronasla-je/11184 (accessed 7 November).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Available at: https://catholicexchange.com/longing-freedom-found-inside-home/ (accessed 5 November 2023).

very careful when communicating with people outside of their immediate family circle, and as guidance, offers an article about dressing modestly. 'Is It Fair to Be Sexy?'[22] asks one of the authors, Marija Grgić (the one 'blessed with a terrific husband and six children'[23]), who continues: 'Is it fair to be desired by somebody's brother, son, husband, child, or a priest even if they don't want to desire you? Is it violent to take advantage of a man's weakness and affection for female beauty? Is it fair to turn his head towards you? Is it fair to his wife? Is it fair to you? Is it fair to his girlfriend or his mother? Is it fair to God?'[24] As expected, she concludes that it can't be fair because 'sometimes it is really hard for a man to resist the temptation of masturbation.'[25] And who is there to be blamed but a devilish girl with a cleavage?! As if this isn't absurd enough, she proceeds by telling a story of a young woman who enjoyed attracting attention by being very 'loud and outspoken,'[26] which apparently annoyed her partner. As the author explains, 'her female need to fight for her rights stood in her way', but 'luckily, she broke that need. It was hard. Little by little, step by step she has become quieter, allowing him to be special.'[27]

This misogynistic discourse escalates in an article about the youngest Catholic saint, eleven-year-old Saint Maria Goretti who died after being stabbed fourteen times by her ten-years-senior rapist. Allegedly, Maria forgave her attacker[28] and even prayed for the salvation of his soul. 'The love she felt for God made her care more about the salvation of the rapist's soul than her own physical health'[29] writes one of the authors, confirming the thesis that 'there is no medium more fit for a promotion of politically incorrect views, violent threats and hate speech than the Internet' (Peović Vuković 2012: 23). But who in their right mind could be an

[22] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/kolumna-li-posteno-biti-seksi/3330 (accessed 5 November 2023).

[23] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/author/marija (accessed 30 October 2023)

[24] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/kolumna-li-posteno-biti-seksi/3330 (accessed 5 November 2023).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] In an absurd argumentation why the rapist should be forgiven, the author of the article states that '…his mother has died in a mental care institution' and he was raised in 'a godless home with paintings of women in provocative poses all over the walls'. Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/marija-goretti-oprostom-rodila-obracenje/6338 (accessed 5 November 2023).

[29] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/marija-goretti-oprostom-rodila-obracenje/6338 (accessed 30 October 2023).

apologist of rape? According to the portal's Facebook page, many. An article about Saint Maria Goretti has acquired more than 79 'likes' and 10 'hearts' while the portal itself has more than 33,000 'followers.' By comparison, the Facebook page of the Dubrovnik Tourist Board has approximately 64,000 followers, and the feminist portal *VoxFeminae* has only 22,000 followers.[30]

More than a hundred years of the feminist fight for women's right to be heard and acknowledged in a political and intellectual sense has pushed society closer to gender equality, but this dubious set of moral standards that place equal importance on obedience and submissiveness seems to be immune to general social changes. Luckily, public discourse promoting these kinds of conservative views and moral norms is, in Croatian society, still relatively rare and frowned upon. As the second web portal covered in this analysis will show, most Croatian women (at least when it comes to readers of online portals) fits somewhere between this Catholic extremism[31] and (still heavily underrated) feminism.

Zadovoljna.hr – female rights in high heels

Upon entering the web portal *Zadovoljna.hr* (loosely translated as 'Satisfied/Content Woman'), followed by more than 353,000 women, you will find more or less the same content as you would on any portal 'specialised for women readers.'[32] In a few very predictable sections *(Fashion & Beauty, Health & Nutrition, Business & Family, Love & Sex, Home & Decorating, Culture & Entertainment*), this portal offers a very light review of all the aforementioned topics, profiling its ideal reader as a real 'product' of the culture of consumerism.

[30] These numbers are taken from their Facebook pages on 22 February 2023.

[31] Adjective *Catholic* should by no means be understood as a synonym for narrow mindedness or bigotry – ideas represented by this, and alike portals are luckily exceptions to the rule and therefore cannot represent the majority of Catholics in Croatia or for that matter anywhere else.

[32] After searching for the syntagm 'portal za žene' (web portal for women) Google will (on 2 February 2023) offer links to the following Croatian portals: *Suvremenažena – lifestyle magazin za sretniji* život (*Modern Woman – Lifestyle Magazine for a Happier Life*), *Žena*.hr (loosely translated as *Woman.com*), *Zaposlena.hr – portal za uspješnu poslovnu ženu* (*Working Woman – Portal for a Successful Business Woman*) and *Amazonke – portal za modern žene* (*Amazons – Portal for Modern Women)*. Although some of these portals offer serious articles and interviews with successful businesswomen, politicians, and entrepreneurs, most of them focus on the subjects of beauty, family, home decorating, love and sex. The exception worth mentioning is *Zaposlena.hr* – however, its accompanying Facebook page shows it has merely 1.1 thousand followers.

Compared to a biblical fine woman, a 'satisfied woman' is a serious sinner. She likes pretty clothes, especially when they're worn by a celebrity. According to their Facebook 'likes,' the biggest hits on *Zadovoljna.hr* are Melania Trump's 'Jeans That Make Your Legs Look Amazing,'[33] Catherine Middleton's 'The Dress We Can't Say No To,'[34] Amal Clooney's 'New Attorney's Business Look Without a Flaw'[35] and Cate Blanchett's 'Lady in Black: A Dress Which Is a Synonym for Sophistication.' Along with being well dressed, the ideal woman apparently must be thin. Although the section *Health & Nutrition* offers a few articles about health (such as 'Silent Symptoms of Diabetes You Mustn't Ignore!'[36] or 'It Really Pays Off: 10 Reasons Why You Should Start Each Day With a Walk'[37]) and food preparation (such as 'Juicy Chestnut and Chocolate Cake Baked Without Any Flour'[38] and 'Important for Your Nerves and Muscles: 15 Groceries Which Contain More Potassium than Bananas'[39]), most of the covered topics revolve around dieting, sending its readers a subtle message that 'healthy,' 'pretty' and 'thin'are actually synonyms. The strategy seems to work perfectly; an article 'Winter Dieting: How Many Calories Can We Burn Ice-Skating?'[40] got more than a 100 likes, 5 hearts/loves and 21 comments on Facebook, while 'From 88 to 349 kuna: 10 Dresses Which Will Make You Look Thinner'[41] got 64 likes within its first hour online, and 'Pure Diet: How To Easily Lose 3 Kilos By Christmas'[42] settled with

[33] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/melania-trump-traperice-u-kojima-noge-dokazano-izgledaju-najbolje---541946.html (accessed 5 November 2023).

[34] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/catherine-middleton-model-haljine-koji-ce-uskoro-zavladati-trgovinama---541972.html (accessed 5 November 2023).

[35] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/izdanje-koje-potvrdjuje-da-je-amal-clooney-kraljica-poslovne-elegancije---767380.html (accessed 30 October 2023).

[36] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/tihi-simptomi-dijabetesa-koje-ne-smijete-ignorirati---416267.html (accessed 5 November 2023).

[37] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/predosti-jutarnjeg-hodanja---685549.html (accessed 5 November 2023).

[38] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/recept-za-tortu-od-kestena-i-cokolade---208451.html (accessed 5 November 2023).

[39] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/namirnice-bogate-kalijem---649826.html (accessed 30 october 2023).

[40] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/zimski-nacin-rada-na-ztesanju-linije-koliko-kalorija-trosi-rekreativno-klizanje---541150.html

[41] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/od-88-do-349-kn-10-novih-modela-haljina-u-kojima-izgledamo-mrsavije---541694.html?fbclid=IwAR3iIT-DhiQxoOlum1twp4qqhnVtnbHQ6TScteDnaMRigVzq6w8D15wRxZYo__(accessed 15 November 2023).

[42] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/cista-dijeta-s-kojom-mozete-izgubiti-3-kilograma-do-bozica---362025.html (accessed 30 October 2023).

125 likes and 29 comments. But where does this obsession with female body weight come from, and how does it affect readers? Although it would be unfair to point to the media as the sole culprit for creating an unhealthy body image ideal, it turns out that 'social comparisons to media images were associated with more frequent body checking to assess weight and shape and more negative feelings, including guilt' (Ridolfi *et al.* 2011: 501).

This imperative for thinness becomes even greater in a section called Love & Sex, where a slim body becomes one of '7 Crazy Things Men Demand of Their Women,'[43] and greater still if it's common knowledge that a day in bed with that perfect body is one of 'Seven Little Reasons Your Man Will Love You Even More.'[44]If you really pay attention, diet as you are supposed to and achieve what is 'impossible for many people to realistically and healthily achieve' (Pritchard & Cramblitt 2014: 209), you might find yourself in a situation where you are looking for '3 Signs That Your Love Is Real,'[45] and maybe even get to say 'My Boyfriend Wants To Marry Me: 10 Signs Your Partner Is About To Propose.'[46]

However, the most absurd section is the one titled *Business & Family*. Although readers of *Zadovoljna.hr* don't think that taking care of a family is a career choice, they are some distance away from emancipation. The section dedicated to 'business problems' offers us articles such as 'How to Manage Your Finances in Ever Harder Living Conditions'[47] and 'Are You One of the People with a Winner's Mentality?'[48] However, also available are 'Unique Jewellery Made Out of Breast Milk as a Memory of Breastfeeding!'[49], the ever-popular 'Troubles with Gifts! 3 Ideal Gifts for Any Gift-Receiver'[50] and '16

[43] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/ljubav-zelje-muskaraca---429047.html (accessed 5 November 2023).

[44] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/kako-osvojiti-muskarca-da-se-zaljubi-u-vas---472870.html (accessed 15 February 2023).

[45]Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/3-znaka-da-ste-imate-pravu-ljubav---528884.html (accessed 30 Ocotber 2023).

[46] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/moj-decko-me-zeni-10-znakova-da-vas-partner-planira-zaprositi---536284.html (accessed 2 February 2023).

[47] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/kako-dovesti-u-red-svoje-financije-u-sve-tezim-zivotnim-okolnostima---766017.html (accessed 2 February 2023).

[48] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/znakovi-da-imate-pobjednicki-mentalitet---764316.html (accessed 2 February 2023).

[49] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/galacta-nakit-od-majcinog-mlijeka---765258.html (accessed 15 February 2023).

[50] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/muke-po-poklonima-3-idealna-dara-za-one-kojima-ne-znamo-sto-pokloniti---540800.html (accessed 15 February 2023).

Boys' and Girls' Names Meaning 'The Gift from God.''[51] Truth be told, articles such as '5 Communication Skills You Will Need To Get a Promotion'[52] or 'The Art of Feminine Leadership Conference'[53] can be found within this section, but only at the very bottom of the web page. This kind of approach is something Susan Douglas calls 'enlightened sexism':

> Enlightened sexism insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism -- indeed, full equality has allegedly been achieved -- so now it's OK, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women. (…) More to the point, enlightened sexism sells the line that it is precisely through women's calculated deployment of their faces, bodies, attire, and sexuality that they gain and enjoy true power, power that is fun, and power that men not only will not resent, but also will embrace. (Douglas 2011)

In a modern, 'postfeminist' society, the glass ceiling has maybe begun to crack in a few spots, but the air coming in is still not fresh enough to save us from suffocating; sure, we can choose from a number of social roles, but while doing so we must not forget to keep performing the ones given to us by society. Therefore, *Zadovoljna.hr* sends its readers a message that for some women, the sky really *is* the limit, but for most of them it is perfectly fine to willingly choose to stay at home raising children, obsess over their looks, or use their sexuality (instead of their brains and intellect) to achieve their goals.

However, this kind of female power is not political or economic but merely purchasing power, so their 'female knowledge' will stay closely tied to the realms of emotions, child rearing, and homemaking. It is hard to know whether editors of *Zadovoljna.hr* succumb to the values of enlightened sexism or are just conformists wanting to sell their product to as many people as they can. However, regardless of the reasons for this kind of editorial policy, *Zadovoljna.hr* must bear its share of guilt for perpetuating gender stereotypes, along with its 353,000 Facebook followers.

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[51] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/imena-za-djevojcice-i-djecake-koja-znace-bozji-dar---767705.html (accessed 3 February 2023).

[52] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/5-komunikacijskih-vjestina-uz-koje-cete-brze-napredovati-u-poslu---540873.html (accessed 15 February 2023).

[53] Available at: https://zadovoljna.dnevnik.hr/clanak/konferencija-the-art-of-feminine-leadership-500-liderica-krajem-sijecnja-u-zagrebu---540053.html (accessed 15 February 2023).

Luckily, not everybody is blinded by this glittery, high-heels-wearing postfeminism. One of the rare bright examples is a feminist portal called *VoxFeminae*.

VoxFeminae – a brave step towards a feminist future

Just as the name of this portal implies (along with its visually attractive logo[54]), its editors' interest is centred around the female voice! Unlike *Žena vrsna* and *Zadovoljna.hr*, *VoxFeminae* is addressing an urban, emancipated woman. In six sections titled *The News, Culture, Justice, Fierce Women, Feministyle* and *The Events Calendar*, this web portal offers its readers the voices and opinions of such women, leaving the interpretation to them and thereby letting each woman choose her own unique path.

Instead of writing about celebrities' clothes or biblical quotes, in a section titled *The News, VoxFeminae* informs us that 'Gender-Based Violence Is Still an Issue in Female Sports,'[55] 'The First Croatian Foundation for Women Has Been Established' and 'Girls Who Grew Up Around Working Mothers Are Better Positioned in the Labour Market,'[56] and writes that 'Only One Percent of Streets in Zagreb Are Named After Women'[57] and 'More Than Half of Murdered Women Died in Their Own Home'[58] which calls for action: 'Let's Stop The Silence – Leave a Mark!'[59]

Exploiting the theses that women are heavily influenced by the images of women they see in the media (Ridolfi *et al.* 2011), *VoxFeminae* bypasses all the sexualised beauties and consumeristic goddesses and introduces its readers to 'Ada Lovelace – A

[54] The logo is a combination of the words 'vox' and 'feminae' while the 'x' appears to be a part of the symbol of a roman goddess Venus, which is a universal symbol for the female sex. Therefore 'the voice' becomes an immanent part of the 'feminine' and the effect becomes even stronger by choosing a Latin version of the noun 'woman' suggesting a long tradition of speaking about woman, as well as the common origin of the terms 'woman' and 'feminine'. Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/ (accessed 2 February 2023).

[55] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/rodno-uvjetovano-nasilje-je-jos-uvijek-problem-u-zenskom-sportu/ (accessed 3 February 2023).

[56] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/djevojke-koje-su-odrasle-sa-zaposlenim-majkama-bolje-su-pozicionirane-na-trzistu-rada/ (accessed 3 February 2023).

[57] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/po-zenama-nazvano-samo-jedan-posto-zagrebackih-ulica/ (accessed 5 November 2023).

[58] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/vise-od-polovine-zena-ubijeno-je-u-vlastitom-domu/ (accessed 5 November 2023).

[59] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/roda-poziva-na-akciju-prekinimo-sutnju-ostavimo-trag/ (accessed 3 February 2023).

Magician of Numbers and a Prophet of the Computer Era,'[60] 'Viola Smith – The First Professional Female Drummer,'[61] 'Selma Lagerlöf – The First Female Nobel Prize for Literature Laureate,'[62] 'Lise Meitner – The Physicist Who Has Not Lost Her Humanity'[63] and 'Simone De Beauvoir – The Greatest French Philosopher and Feminist,'[64] as well as a multitude of poets, writers, actresses and scientists. As the section title suggests, all these women are fierce – not only because of their fresh ideas and innovations, but also because they have challenged patriarchy and made a crack in its glass ceiling. Moreover, editors of *VoxFeminae* might be considered fierce women as well. Amongst the 50 people editing the portal are university professors, writers, philosophers, astrophysicists, theatrologists, interpreters, sociologists, anthropologists and even a theologian.

Following the thesis of the editors of *Žena vrsna* that 'Feminism and Its Delusions'[65] cannot find a common ground with true Christianity because 'assimilation of the roles of man and woman, mother and father is a threat to manhood,' we will address the problem of motherhood as editors of *VoxFeminae* see it. Are feminists really, as *Žena vrsna* implies, women who despise motherhood? Although they don't fall under the influence of something that Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels call 'the new momism' – that is, 'the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children' (Douglas & Michaels 2004: 10) – *VoxFeminae* acknowledges that being a mother is an important role in the lives of some women. However, it asserts that the responsibility for raising a child does not lie solely in the hands of a woman, or even a family, and that the burden of child-rearing should lie with the whole of society.

[60] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/strasne-zene/ada-lovelace-carobnica-brojeva-i-prorocica-racunalne-ere/ (accessed 15 February 2023).

[61] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/strasne-zene/viola-smith-prva-profesionalna-bubnjarka/ (accessed 3 February 2023).

[62] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/search/selma%20lagerlof.

[63] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/strasne-zene/lise-meitner-fizicarka-kojanije-izgubila-ljudskost-2/ (accessed 30 October 2023).

[64] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/strasne-zene/simone-de-beauvoir-najveca-francuska-filozofkinja-i-feministkinja/ (accessed 5 November 2023).

[65] Available at: https://zenavrsna.com/feminizam-i-njegove-zablude/11592 (accessed 3 February 2023).

Consequently, *VoxFeminae* offers a multitude of articles in this area, such as 'Zuzana Límová: Giving Birth Is Not a 'Female Subject' – It Concerns the Whole of Society,'[66] 'By Investing Into a Quality Of Kindergarten Care We Are Empowering Women To Go Back To Work,'[67] 'The First Free Kindergarten Opens in Umag'[68] and 'A Whole Lot of Ways Finland Cares About Natality.'[69] Additionally, there are articles that provide readers with stories about real working mothers ('Mothers, Scientists and the Myth of Flexibility'[70] or 'The Prime Minister of New Zealand – The Second Woman Giving Birth During the Mandate'[71]), giving them real-life role models and concrete strategies for survival in a harsh business world. This approach is, in the sphere of 'web portals for women,' quite revolutionary – instead of tying women to the realm of the family home (*Žena vrsna*), or turning women into Barbie dolls who can do whatever they want, as long as they are wearing high heels and pretty clothes (*Zadovoljna.hr*), *VoxFeminae* paints a picture of a real world, no matter how unpretty it may be. Moreover, the responsibility for education and child-rearing no longer lies wholly with a mother (or even a father as her equal partner), but in a large part on institutions like kindergartens and schools, and even on the society as a whole.

Despite its 'healthier' view of women, *Vox Feminae* remains marginal, at least within the category of 'web portals for women.' Compared to the 33,000 followers of *Žena vrsna* and 353,000 followers of *Zadovoljna.hr*, *Vox Feminae*'s number of 22,000 seems surprisingly low. Does that mean that the subjects they are covering are in fact irrelevant, or does the reason for its fairly low number of readers lie in its somewhat demanding style of writing and almost complete lack of 'glamour'? The answer might be the usage of a notorious adjective: *feminist*. According to Susan Douglas (2011), 'feminism – a social movement that has done so much for women, and for men,

[66] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/pravednost/zuzana-limova-porod-nije-zenska-tema-vec-se-tice-citavog-drustva/ (accessed 2 February 2023).

[67] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/ulaganjem-u-kvalitetu-vrtica-do-vece-zaposlenosti-zena-2/ (accessed 15 February 2023).

[68] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/u-umagu-otvoren-prvi-besplatni-djecji-vrtic-u-hrvatskoj/ (accessed 3 February 2023).

[69] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/puna-kutija-nacina-na-koji-se-finska-brine-o-natalitetu/ (accessed 15 February 2023).

[70] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/feministyle/majke-znanstvenice-i-mit-o-fleksibilnosti/ (accessed 30 October 2023).

[71] Available at: https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/novozelandska-premijerka-usla-u-povijest-kao-druga-zena-koja-je-rodila-za-vrijeme-mandata/ (accessed 3 February 2023).

for that matter – has been so vilified in the media that many young women regard it as the ideological equivalent of anthrax.' Thanks to the misogynistic efforts of the patriarchy, feminism has been presented as a movement *against* men (instead of *for* women), *against* gender equalityand *for* female supremacy; in such a social climate, saying you are a feminist is almost equal to openly stating that you are a misandrist. That is precisely the link between *VoxFeminae* and its ideological antipode, *Žena vrsna*. Unlike the conformist Zadovoljna.hr, both web portals represent beliefs and values of a (relatively) narrow subculture – only the boldest are willing to publicly identify with these ideas. Sure, marching in a protest takes some civil courage, regardless of whether it is a March for Life or a Pride March, but to click on a 'like' button requires *an equal amount of* bravery, even if it's an act of casual 'slacktivism'[72] (Peović Vuković 2012: 141). Once you've decided to follow a Facebook page, your support will become part of your online persona and will be displayed not only to your online friends, but to all your future friends, business associates and potential employers.

Conclusion

Are the three web portals highlighted above a result of an endless technological growth and a radical democratisation of media space, or just an echo of social plurality that existed long before social networks created a platform for it? From the feminist point of view, this question is redundant. No matter the reason, voices of the conservative *Žena vrsna*, the commercialised *Zadovoljna.hr* and the rebellious *VoxFeminae* are now coexisting parts of a public discourse. Which voice will find its way to the widest audience depends not only on their quality or the importance of the message they are communicating, but also on a community's attitude towards them. The responsibility for change certainly lies on the back of society but in the era of new media, when the boundary between consumers and producers has almost faded, it is unfair to distance oneself from individual responsibility. 'Liking' a news article or a Facebook page is no longer a private act of showing affection but has instead become a political act of promoting certain messages, ideas, and ideologies. The role of the great saviour is at last in our own hands.

[72] This pejorative term refers to a digital activism which enables a person to identify with a certain movement or a campaign, but only on a declarative level, without any real effort, just by pressing a 'click' button or posting something online.

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The Confrontation with 'Gender Ideology' Discourse in Croatia: Feminism, Digital Media, Activism

Mirela Dakić

Summary

While approaching *the anti-gender movements* as an international 21st-century phenomenon, in the paper we discuss the strategies of feminist confrontations with *the 'gender ideology' discourse* in Croatia during 2017 and 2018, when the discourse was strongly articulated regarding the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. We put a particular emphasis on the status of digital media as a point of resistance to the conservative discourses on gender. As the overview shows, the various contents of the feminist digital media are critically opposed not only to the 'gender ideology' discourse used by the conservative organisations and networks, but also to its rather uncritical dissemination in the mainstream media and its implementation in the interpretative declaration which followed the Croatian ratification of the Convention. Furthermore, feminist engagement in the sphere of digital media was combined with other strategies of resistance to this discourse, such as press conferences, open letters, protest actions, and counter-protests. However, as 'gender ideology' persists as an empty signifier in the public and media discourse, we reflect on the future of feminist critical knowledge in the hybrid space of digital media, education, and activism which emerges in the transdisciplinary and international context.

Keywords: anti-gender movements, 'gender ideology', feminism, digital media, Istanbul Convention

I

Although the modern feminist movements and theories criticised the patriarchal gender relations and norms for at least two centuries, the appropriation of their categorical apparatus by conservative social groups, organisations, and networks is a more recent phenomenon. The specific resistances to the gender equality values and policies which appeared in European countries at the beginning of the 21st century and took *gender* as a primary signifier of the broad phenomena they criticise, are often widely addressed as *the anti-gender movements* (Kuhar, Patternote 2017). While the anti-gender movements are heterogeneous in terms of the social and political context in which they occur, the specificities of their group organisation and the strategies they use (Gergorić 2020: 151), among its most visible and most often-analysed discourses we can recognise the specific discourse against 'gender ideology'.[1] The term initially opposed 'women's and LGBT rights activism as well as the scholarship deconstructing essentialist and naturalistic assumptions about gender and sexuality' (Kuhar, Patternote 2017: 5). While understanding 'ideology' as a distorted view of the supposed reality – the reality of naturally, if not even divinely given differences between the *two sexes* – in the framework of this discourse 'gender ideology' is regarded as 'a sort of conspiracy aimed at seizing power and imposing deviant and minority values to average people' (Ibid., 6).

The coined term enabled the movement to create 'a unified image of the enemy and unite the religious and non-religious actors in a broad mobilisation, as well as to create moral panic in the public sphere and prevent legal and social reforms in the system of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the rights of LGBT persons' (Gergorić 2020: 154). Moreover, the combat against 'gender ideology' brought the new actors onto the social and political scene and united them with the already existing conservative groups (Ibid., 156). Although it appears in various 'national manifestations', the movement against 'gender ideology' is at the same time a 'transnationally circulating' phenomenon (Kuhar, Patternote 2017: 2) with international networking as a specific strategy of movements. As Kuhar and Patternote noticed,

[1] Since the discourse that constitutes itself around the criticism of the supposed 'gender ideology' is the primary source of this term, where from it widely spread in the public and media discourse, we will refer to it as the 'gender ideology' discourse.

in an international framework, the movement also intersects with the rising of right-wing populism in Europe: 'the shift towards the Right reinforces these campaigns and provides them with new supporters who took over a concept of 'gender ideology' which shares some ideological structures with right-wing populist ideology' (Ibid., 13).

Among the European countries that have been affected by a wave of anti-gender movements in recent years, the specific unification of the conservative civil, political, and religious actors against 'gender ideology' can be observed in Croatian society as well, both in its international and particular manifestations. The anti-gender movement in Croatia has already become a specific focus of research interest in the national and comparative context (Gergorić 2020: 161), but during the last decade 'gender ideology' also became a part of everyday public and media discourse in the Croatian society. In this sense, as a recognisable tune, the 'gender ideology' discourse in Croatia was most strongly used before the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (*Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence*) in 2018. In this paper, we will discuss the strategies of feminist confrontations with 'gender ideology' discourse in Croatia during 2017 and 2018, with a particular emphasis on the status of digital media as a point of resistance to the conservative discourses on gender.

II

Among various possible introductions to the problem of 'gender ideology', we will shortly refer to Judith Butler's text *The Backlash Against 'Gender Ideology' Must Stop*, published in January 2019 in the magazine *New Statesman*. Here the influential American philosopher, who is often targeted as the 'mother of 'gender ideology'' (Kuhar, Patternote 2017: 5), refers to the widespread 'gender ideology' discourse and traces its source back to the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* written by the Pontifical Council on the Family in 2004.[2] The letter warned its

[2] Looking at the decade before, Kuhar and Patternote underline that 'the notion of 'gender ideology' took shape in the mid-nineties as a response to the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights in the UN rights system' (2017: 9), concerning the 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women.

addressees about 'the potential of 'gender' to destroy feminine values important to the Church; […] and to contest the natural, hierarchical distinction between male and female upon which family values and social life are based' (Butler 2019b). Therefore, what was first articulated as the institutional accusation directed towards the feminist categorical apparatus, in a decade developed into a wide conservative attack on women's and LGBT rights across Europe. From this point of view, the very differentiation between the biological sex and the social, cultural, and historical constructions of gender relations, norms, and roles, which is at the core of modern feminist engagement, is seen as 'an attempt to usurp God's power of creation and defy the divinely imposed limits on human agency' (Ibid.). Furthermore, as Kuhar and Patternote argued, the Church not only coined the term but also 'provided a powerful mobilisation and diffusion network' for activists who participated in the movement and the new channels of cooperation which emerged in particular countries (Kuhar, Patternote 2017: 12). In the final equation, 'an academic concept such as gender, when translated by a powerful religious organisation like the Roman Catholic Church and intersecting with the current populist wave in Europe, has become a mobilising tool and the target of massive social movements' (Ibid., 16).

Keeping the 20th-century discussion and development of feminist categorical apparatus aside, Butler refers to Simone de Beauvoir's thought to confront the supposed 'ideology' of 'gender' with the basic premises of feminist engagement: that to be assigned a certain sex at birth should not determine what someone will become. The credo of the decades-long feminist movements and theories, as in the case of Beauvoir's famous book *The Second Sex* (1949), becomes rather problematic from the perspective of the reproduction of a patriarchal, heteronormative society. However, the dispute is far from conceptual:

> … those who wish to abort would be prevented from exercising that freedom; gay and lesbian people who would like to marry would be denied the option of realising that desire; and those who wish to take on a gender distinct from the sex assigned to them at birth would be prohibited from doing so. What is more, schools that seek to teach gender diversity would be constrained, and young people would be denied knowledge about the actual spectrum of gendered lives. Such pedagogy in gender diversity is understood by its critics as a dogmatic exercise that prescribes how students should think or live. (Butler 2019b)

Therefore, what is at stake here is not only the contemporary feminist intellectual and activist engagement as the direct target of the conservative critiques but also a whole legacy of the 20th-century feminist struggle for gender equality and hard-won rights. Indeed, it is hard to believe that 'a poorly funded branch of research with marginal academic standing should come to be seen as the reigning 'ideology', as a force destructive of a national culture' (von Redecker 2016: 3). As Butler notices, 'the aim of this movement is not simply to eliminate the word 'gender' or even to outlaw the so-called theory of gender, but to undermine the justification for a wide range of policies' (Butler, 2019: 5). In that sense, if the anti-gender movement is ought to 'defend and mobilise a deeply reactionary worldview, it becomes immediately evident that simple correction of its mistakes does not lead very far' (von Redecker 2016: 5). Having this in mind, what possibilities do the actors in the public sphere, primarily media and education, have to confront the 'gender ideology' discourse to prevent its potential consequences? And how can we face this problem in the context of contemporary Croatian society?

III

Due to the frequent and symptomatic use of the term 'gender ideology' in the Croatian public discourse which followed anti-gender initiatives in the country during the last decade,[3] we can find it among the entries in Hajrudin Hromadžić's *Leksikon tranzicije* (*Lexicon of Transition*, 2022).[4] While understanding *transition* as an ideological signifier that covers 'the contradictions and antagonisms that are in the foundations of liberal capitalism' (Hromadžić 2022: 14), the book is critically oriented on the various 'discursive solutions' in the public and media discourse which emerged in the allegedly transitory experience of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav societies. The entry 'gender ideology' primarily corresponds with the 'second and third decade of the 21st century, when it becomes certain that the dreams of transition are filled

[3] In an overview of the conservative social movements in Croatia, Gegić (2021) analysed the cases that preceded 'gender ideology' discourse related to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention: the initiative against health and sex education in schools (2012), and the initiative for the constitutional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (2013). The actors, networks, discourses, and strategies of these cases are also analysed in detail in Hodžić and Štulhofer 2017.

[4] Before this edition, the author's texts were published in the weekly magazine *Novosti* (*News* or *Novelties*) and its portal from October 2018 to April 2021.

with nightmares of capitalist exploitation and neoconservative-clerical counter-revolution with elements of the threatening escalation of neofascism' (Ibid., 20). As Hromadžić explains, the 'gender ideology' discourse primarily stands against the tradition of women's rights founded on Beauvoir's famous thesis that *one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman* (Ibid., 93), most of which were already accomplished in the 'former' country.

Although in Croatia the 'gender ideology' appeared with the campaign against sex education in schools in 2012 (Hodžić, Štulhofer 2017: 65), and it was continually used during the campaign for the constitutional definition of marriage, the discourse got stronger and more frequent before the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2018. Today a Google search about the Convention in Croatian leads to the Government's website with basic information about the document and to its Croatian translation published by the Government's Office for Gender Equality. However, the third entry leads to the website of the citizens' initiative *Istina o Istanbulskoj* (*The Truth about the Istanbul Convention*) which criticised the 'unacceptable' parts of the Convention and explained the dangers of 'gender ideology' that is, according to the authors, introduced in the document. As they explain, the unacceptable parts of the Convention are: 'the introduction of the term gender and the non-scientific gender theory'; 'incompatibility with The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia', 'eradication of the tradition and family values', and 'forcing gender ideology upon children in preschools, schools, and the media'.[5] However, if we read the text of the Convention,[6] it is obvious that the very use of the term *gender* to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence was a sufficient reason for the initiative to start collecting signatures for the referendum against the ratification, which fortunately failed.

As Hodžić and Štulhofer argued in the analysis of the anti-gender movements in Croatia between 2012 and 2014, the Croatian version of the 'gender ideology' discourse shares characteristics with other European movements, but it also uses some specific strategies which are primarily related to 'the post-communist and

[5] https://istinaoistanbulskoj.info/neprihvatljivo-u-istanbulskoj-konvenciji

[6] The Convention recognises the violence against women as gender-based in the following sense: ''gender' shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men; 'gender-based violence against women' shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately' (https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention).

post-conflict context (the break-up of Yugoslavia), characterised by a surge of religious self-identification and nationalist rhetoric' (2017: 59). Therefore, the discourse is often followed by 'a strong anti-communist rhetoric' (Ibid., 66). As the large-scale national probability surveys showed, during the 1990s, in the wake of war and the centre-right government in Croatia, we can notice a substantial increase in religious identification, which led to Croatia being placed among 'highly religious' European countries in the first decade of the 21st century (Ibid., 61). As Hodžić and Štulhofer explain, '[i]t is precisely the rising political power and sociocultural influence of the national Catholic Church, as well as the surge of public displays of religiosity, that has inspired the new movement and provided it with support for its actions' (Ibid., 71). On the other hand, since the religiosity is negatively associated with the acceptance of homosexuality (Ibid., 61), this association among other factors brought us to the referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman in 2013.[7]

However, the referendum was also preceded by a strategic change in the conservative organisations: 'Contentious social morality politics, which has been a characteristic of the network's activities since 2012, were based on the concepts of public engagement and collective action, rather than on the idea of awareness raising that marked pre-2006 activism. Since the 2010s, the conservative network has focused on influencing public opinion directly, mostly through protests' (Ibid., 68). At the same time, they accomplished a significant visibility in the mainstream media, both public and commercial: 'Aware that the activities of a single CSO could not sustain journalists' and editors' interest, the member CSOs rotated in issuing press statements and organising media conferences, which often announced libel suits against critical journalists and liberal activists' (*Ibidem*). Their visibility was especially reinforced in the digital space: 'Operating through a number of websites, online discussion groups and personal commentaries posted on news portals, Internet activism was particularly useful in protest e-mail campaigns […] and the

[7] As Hodžić and Štulhofer remind us, '[d]uring two weeks in May, with apparent support from the Catholic Church, the organisers managed to collect almost 750,000 signatures, twice the required number for the Parliament to set up a referendum. The referendum was held in December, with a 38% turnout. Two-thirds of participants voted in favour of the proposed constitutional provision' (Hodžić, Štulhofer 2017: 63).

organisation of public protest' (Ibid., 69). After the 'success' of the referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage as a heterosexual union, we can notice a specific 'momentum of conservative associations and initiatives' in our public discourse (Gegić 2021: 15). The campaign inspired later activities concerning women's and LGBT rights such as the Truth about the Istanbul Convention. In a detailed analysis of the strategies of this initiative, which, aside from the collecting of signatures for the referendum, also included public discussions, roundtables, participation in the Parliament's bodies, and appeals to the Constitutional Court (Ibid., 26), Gegić concludes that 'although it was not successful, the initiative once again demonstrated the presence of the religious-political movement on the Croatian activist scene and influenced the future acts of the other participants in this field' (Ibid.).

It was a lucky coincidence that in June 2018, while the topic was still present in the daily and weekly press, Judith Butler visited the University of Rijeka. In front of the full National Theatre, she opened the summer school Critique of Violence Now: From Thinking to Acting Against Violence with the lecture titled *Interpreting Non-Violence*. On this occasion, Butler gave an interview for our daily newspaper *Jutarnji list*, which ironically titled the theorist as 'the mother of the diabolical theory' (Benčić, Butler 2018). Since she was asked to comment on the constitutional definition of marriage and the resistance to the Istanbul Convention in Croatia, Butler stressed the importance of knowledge in overcoming the current condition. However, is gaining *knowledge* only a dream for future generations? And what about those who work on turning the *biological* into *existential destiny* today? Is there any hope that not only the defence of gender studies as a discipline but also of the concept of gender to protect women's and LGBT rights could change the current situation? As Butler noticed in a text titled *What Treat? Campaign Against "Gender Ideology"*, the term is summed up by a phantasm that deflects from the fact that hardly anyone who opposes this matter has read texts within the field or considers their arguments. Indeed, the position against gender seems to be a position against reading more generally' (Butler 2019a: 3). And is there a possibility for education without reading?

Since sex education in Croatian schools is officially a part of health education, and feminist and gender theory are still primarily a part of academic education in literary theory, philosophy, and sociology, the role of the media in the representation and construction of the relevant topics regarding gender equality in

a wider social, political, and cultural context is indispensable. As was argued before, the 'gender ideology' discourse itself was largely constituted through media, while its participants were especially mobilised in the digital space. Therefore, in the next part of the paper we will discuss the media presentation of the cluster of themes regarding 'gender ideology'. We will outline feminist contributions in the domain of digital media in the context of other strategies of resistance and problematise the (in)visibility of feminist critical perspective in the mainstream (both public and commercial) media.

IV

As Hromadžić explains, media studies have for decades been proving that 'the media are by no means just a mere factor in the transmission of information, but actively participate in the construction of social, political, economic, cultural, and any other reality, and are at the same time a product of those same realities' (Hromadžić 2014: 18). Specific feminist media in the Croatian context are mostly present in a form of non-profit digital portals that cover a wide spectrum of social and cultural themes. At a roundtable *Feminist Media: Why and For Whom?* organised in August 2016 the editors of two such portals, Jelena Tešija from *Libela: portal about gender, sex and democracy* and Marino Čajdo from *VoxFeminae.net*, discussed their status in a wider political and cultural climate. As they pointed out, such non-profit platforms offer content of public interest that often stays out of focus in the mainstream media (M. A. 2016). Despite the financial instability deepened in 2016 with the reduction of state subventions and the crisis in institutional infrastructure of non-profit media, the reach and interest for such content continuously grow, but the rare inclusion of their editors and contributors in the mainstream media is mostly related to the questions of women's employment and violence against women (Ibid.). As Tešija validly pointed out, liberal feminism and celebrity feminism are much more welcome in the mainstream media than the diversity of feminist perspectives as well as feminist social and cultural criticism (Ibid.).

If we turn to feminist portals which were active during the strongest articulations of 'gender ideology' discourse and offered a critical perspective on this issue, we will find content that rarely, if ever, appears in mainstream media. Except for daily news about the topic, *VoxFeminae* promotes relevant publications, such as *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilising Against Equality* published in

2017 by Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, who gave an interview for the portal related to the edition.[8] *VoxFeminae* also brings up the critique of 'gender ideology' discourse and the comparative analysis of anti-gender movements. While also following the situation daily, on *Libela* we can find critical analysis of the appearance and usage of 'gender ideology' in Croatian public space, as well as the analysis of the Convention and commentary on sex and gender as categories in the humanities and social sciences in comparison to their misuse in public and media space.[9] Furthermore, the LGBT news portal *CROL* also published insightful critical comments on the Government's procedures, the Convention's goals, and the category of gender.[10]

While the critical responses to 'gender ideology' in the specifically feminist media are complementary with other critical contributions to the topic within the spectrum of non-profit media and even some rare pieces of criticism in the mainstream media, they mostly stand out from the general, unproblematized dissemination of the term 'gender ideology' in the public and media discourse. Therefore, the feminist engagement in digital media regarding the 'gender ideology' in 2017/2018 was combined with other strategies, such as open letters and press conferences, where the representatives of civil society organisations and activists warned about the responsibility of both the media and the political institutions for the widespread usage of the term which conceals the central issue of the Convention. In October 2017 several feminist and human rights CSOs[11] and feminist activists published an open letter titled *Nasilje and riječima, nasilje je protiv* žena (*Violence Against Words is Violence Against Women*) as a defence of the term *gender* in the context of understanding gender-based violence.[12] At the press conference, the signatories of the letter warned about the responsibility of the media which uncritically disseminates the term 'gender ideology' and gives space to the opponents of the Istanbul Convention who have no expertise in the protection from sexual and gendered violence.[13]

[8] See Bertek, Kuhar and Patternote 2017.

[9] See Kašić 2017, Živković 2017 and 2018, and Raos 2018.

[10] See Jović 2017 and 2018.

[11] Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb, CESI (Center for Education, Counseling and Research), CMS (Centre for Peace Studies), RODA (Parents in Action), and Ženska soba (Women's Room).

[12] http://zenskasoba.hr/hr/otvoreno-pismo-povodom-odrzane-press-konferencije-nasilje-nad-rijecima-nasilje-zenama/

[13] https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/kampanja-protiv-rodne-ideologije-je-nasilje-nad-zenama-porucile-aktivistice/

In December of the same year, another open letter was published by the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb and the Centre for Women's Studies from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, whose signatories also warned about the 'contamination' of the public and media space, as well as the public responsibility of the representatives of political institutions to alter this situation:

> We especially call for responsibility when using concepts such as gender and sex, and against the untrue and paranoid discourse about established concepts and the distinction between sex and gender, based on which some of the most progressive laws and conventions that protect the dignity of every human being are created. We also advocate for the affirmation of gender equality in all areas of social life (politics, media, education, work, etc.) and call on state institutions, especially those with responsibility for gender equality and scientific integrity, to point out manipulative practices and ignorant interpretations in the field of gender issues through their direct public engagement [...].[14]

However, the ratification of the Convention in Croatia was followed by an 'interpretative declaration' which claimed that the document did not 'contain the obligation to introduce gender ideology into the Croatian legal and educational system, nor the obligation to change the constitutional definition of marriage'.[15] Therefore, instead of a critical rejection, the *empty signifier*[16] which could contain different meanings and contents concerning sexual and gendered domains in the future entered the official document and is therefore confirmed as relevant in the discussion of the issues related to sexuality and gender. And what is 'gender ideology' that the Convention doesn't contain, but supposedly exists outside of it?

The Government's vote for the Convention was followed by a press conference organised by the Women's Network in Croatia to support the Government's decision.[17] Two days later, on March 24,

[14] https://zenstud.hr/2017/12/29/otvoreno-pismo-centra-za-zenske-studije-u-zagrebu-i-rijeci/

[15] https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/medunarodni/2018_05_3_27.html

[16] As Mayer and Sauer argue, invoking Laclau's analysis, the functioning of 'gender ideology' as an empty signifier is one of the reasons for its efficiency: 'It neither denominates specific social phenomena or policies nor an ideological standpoint, but a vague (albeit emotionally loaded) rejection of the development of family policies, gender equality, gender studies, sexuality policies and sex education' (Mayer, Sauer 2017: 23).

[17] https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/politicarke-i-aktivistkinje-katolkinje-i-ateistkinje-ujedinjene-za-ratifikaciju-istanbulske-konvencije/

2018, the opponents of the Convention protested in Zagreb, while the representatives of feminist and human rights CSOs as well as activists held counter-protest dressed in recognisable handmaid's robes inspired by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Namely, from December 2017, the advocates of the Convention protested in this way with a demand for ratification. These protests are the strategy of the feminist resistance to the 'gender ideology' which was most visible in the mainstream media. Together with other protest actions our CSOs and activists participated in, they joined transnational occasions such as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 24 November 2017 which was followed by the protest action and the collection of signatures for the ratification of the Convention,[18] and the One Billion Rising on 9 February 2018 with the protest 'Maids are rising for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention'.[19] Although the contributors of the feminist digital media during the campaign against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention put much effort into the critique of 'gender ideology' discourse, the attention of a large part of the mainstream media and the pressure that goes along with it was still mostly focused on other strategies of resistance and developed simultaneously with the uncritical use of the term. However, the repository of feminist knowledge established as a critical response to this campaign is an important stake for challenges that arise in the field of women's and LGBT rights and is most loudly articulated during the annual March 8 protests across the country.

V

The tenth anniversary of the Convention originating in Istanbul in 2011 brought up analysis and reflections on its efficiency in an international context. From an international perspective, what can be noticed regarding the already outlined problems with 'gender ideology' discourse is an 'increasingly strong resistance to the Convention. Unprecedented antagonism toward a binding Convention because of the so-called 'gender ideology' culminated when Turkey, the first signatory of the Convention, ceased to be its party in July 2021' (Željko 2021: 401). On the other hand, what is to be expected is 'the expansion of the scope of positive obligations of all members of the Council of Europe in terms of gender-based violence'

[18] https://libela.org/vijesti/9135-zene-hrvatske-za-ratifikaciju-istanbulske-konvencije-do-kraja-2017-godine/

[19] https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/sluskinje-pozvale-na-ratifikaciju-istanbulske-konvencije/

(Ibid., 402). Therefore, given the nature of the signifier 'gender ideology', worrisome are the consequences of the dissemination of conservative discourse about 'gender ideology' on legal acts and ultimately on the victims of violence that the Convention aims to protect. In that sense one of the most important assignments of contemporary and future gender studies is to understand the dynamics of the anti-gender movements (Butler 2019b, Kuhar, Patternote 2017: 2). Faced with the wide alliance of anti-gender movements and the 'gender ideology' discourse with a whole spectrum of conservatism and authoritarianism on the one side, and the internal splits in the disciplinary field of gender and women's studies on the other side, it is to be expected that the latter will have to redirect its focus towards the critical potentials of its categorical apparatus that is contained primarily in the idea of *gender* that opens up the possibilities of future *becoming*. However, since the discipline itself is not the cause nor the target of the movement, it is necessary to rethink the strategies of critical resistance to the conservative discourses on gender in a wider, transdisciplinary framework. To return to the beginning of our discussion, the question 'how can any meaningful speech about gender equality, values, and theoretical derivatives arising from it be started at all' (Kašić 2017) is still of the highest relevance, since it ought to happen 'in the atmosphere of the installation of family moral order and righteous orders about sexual behaviour, which the empty political narrative de facto empowers and privileges for the purpose of subjugation' (Ibid.). This is the point where the disciplinary work and engagement meet the emerging digital repository of feminist knowledge, as opposed to the harmful misuse of gender in terms of the discourse proclaimed against 'gender ideology'. As the case of 'gender ideology' discourse in Croatia before the ratification of the Istanbul Convention shows, feminist digital media are the rare lacuna where the manipulative and uncritical use of this signifier is brought into question with disciplinary grounded analysis and criticism. However, in the time of ground-breaking decisions, this production necessarily associates with other strategies. What stays as an open question is how to use the productive aspects of the media discourse for emancipatory feminist goals and its digital space in the international framing of the current issues and resistances. If the particular answers to this question would at least for a part of those who consider themselves 'non-normative' mean 'to live in this world without fear, to love and to exist, and to seek to create a world more equitable and freer of violence' (Butler 2019b), then it is worth to keep the search open.

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Resisting Profit: The 'Aimless' Productivity of Fan Fiction Authors and Readers

Maša Huzjak

Summary

During the second year of the COVID19 pandemic, two major shifts in online discourse became apparent, and were quickly absorbed into the mainstream. Firstly, people became more vocal about the disillusionment with late-stage capitalism. Secondly, perhaps as a direct response to the growing anti-capitalist sentiment, there was an increase in sharing those hobbies and interests that were not profit-driven, which ultimately led a slow-burn fan fiction to become one of the most talked-about texts of 2021. While fan fiction still isn't considered 'proper literature', its impact on the publishing industry, literary trends, and the very shape of language used both online and offline has become undeniable. Written and read primarily by girls, women and genderqueer people, fan fiction often serves as a place of resistance to the patriarchal, heteronormative patterns that a vast majority of mass media still follows by default. However, the appeal of fan fiction lies not only in its insistence on integration of marginalised voices into mainstream content, but in the seemingly aimless productivity it breeds. Fan fiction remains one of the rare creative outlets where authors write almost exclusively for their own pleasure, or the pleasure of the community they are a part of, and where reader engagement does not require money or even social/cultural capital. In this paper I will analyse the unprofitable productivity of fan fiction, its ability to build and sustain (diverse, safe, loving) communities, its reassurance that creativity can thrive without the promise of financial gain.

Keywords: fan fiction, marginalised voices, authorship, readers, productivity

Prologue

The year is 2003 and I am surfing the internet, a vast and still unfamiliar space with hideous colour schemes and chatrooms that scream 'Stranger danger!' I am searching for a very specific type of content. I do not know its name, but I do know that it brings me infinite joy. I am watching *Once and Again*, a now-forgotten ABC drama about two families navigating life and love in Illinois. One of the main characters and my personal favourite, Jessie, falls in love with her classmate Katie and their limited screen time does not satisfy my need for queer teen romance, so I type 'Jessie and Katie' into the void and start reading what I later understand is fan fiction. There are no thoughts, just feelings.

The year is 2018 and I am presenting a short paper on representations of fangirling in young adult novels. Although I am a long-term reader of fan fiction, I am only just beginning to approach it as anything other than a fangirl myself, which is why I am thoroughly unprepared when this question on a panel following my presentation hits me: 'So what is the point of writing fan fiction? Can you monetise it? Can you publish it as a *real* work of fiction?' I am struggling to explain that yes, many authors of fan fiction publish separate works of 'real', 'original' fiction, some have transformed their fan fiction into 'original' fiction, and some have even made millions off of their wildly popular franchises.[1] Fan fiction can be a starting point, a tool to hone your writing skills, an online space where you can slowly establish a fan base. While all of this is technically true – some fan fiction authors build successful careers outside the realm of fan fiction and are able to make a living as professional writers – it is not the right answer.

The year is 2021 and I am reading *All the Young Dudes*, a five-hundred-thousand-word novel that takes place within the once universally beloved and currently extremely polarising Harry Potter universe. The author of this particular fan fiction goes by MsKingBean89 and that is all their readers are allowed to know about them. Despite the total anonymity of the author, *All the Young Dudes* has over thirteen million views at the moment, and

[1] The best-known example for this type of fan-to-author monetisation is still the infamous *Fifty Shades* novel series written by author (and *Twilight* fan) E. L. James. The series started out in 2011 and spanned the entire decade. It consists of six novels which have earned James staggering thirty seven million dollars by 2015. (Doward, 2015)

has become a literary phenomenon on social media.[2] The work was first published on the website called Archive of Our Own (from now on simply AO3) in late 2018 and has accumulated so many comments and kudos[3] that the author had to stop interacting with the readers altogether. Their fan fiction is now so widely known that even people who have never read fan fiction or been invested in the *Harry Potter* saga have heard of it, and fans actively have to remind other fans of copyright laws.[4]

What follows is a lengthy amendment to the answer I gave in 2018, when it still seemed that having purpose and making profit are synonymous, that monetising one's hobbies should always be a priority and that online communities are worthless if they do not consist of prospective investors.

Chapter I: A very short introduction into fan fiction

Before I delve into examples of fan fiction production and consumption, I must go back to basics with a simple question that will lay the groundwork for the ensuing analysis: What even is fan fiction? According to Hellekson and Busse, the term first appeared in the 1940s, but the definitions of fan fiction vary in scope and point towards a long tradition of 'derivative amateur writing' (Hellekson and Busse 2014: 6). The definition most relevant to this paper is as follows: 'If we look at it as a (sometimes purposefully critical) rewriting of shared media, then media fan fiction, starting in the 1960s, would start fan fiction proper' (*Ibidem*). While the key elements of contemporary fan fiction definitely remain the same as in the 1960s – key elements being community predominantly comprised of women and genderqueer people, and critical insertion into an already-existing literary landscape – the 2000s brought one significant change which ultimately led to introduction of fan fiction into the mainstream. I am, of course, referring to the internet.

[2] Largely thanking to BookTook, specifically fan fiction TikTok, through which the gospel of this particular work of fan fiction has been spreading like wildfire (Hampton 2021).

[3] Equivalent to likes/hearts on other social media platforms.

[4] Because hundreds of fans have actually started printing and binding this text into volumes, some for their personal use, but some for sale, which is in clear violation of basic principles upon which fan fiction operates. As far as it is publicly known, MsKingBean89 hasn't made any money from *All the Young Dudes* and has always requested from their audience to respect their privacy and follow the copyright guidelines.

What fan fiction is today cannot be divorced from virtual reality and virtual literacy – from modes of sharing to the structure of the text itself:

> Fan objects thus form a *field of gravity*, which may or may not have an *ur*text in its epicenter, but which in any case corresponds with the fundamental meaning structure through which all these texts are read. The fan text is thus constituted through a multiplicity of textual elements; it is by definition intertextual and formed between and across texts as defined at the point of production (Sandvoss 2014: 65).

Fan fiction authors and readers use tags, notes and comment sections to easily signal their intent or feelings, but these tools weren't at their disposal before the rise of popular fan fiction websites. This also means that the fandoms and fan fiction communities within fandoms have taken on new responsibilities which I will quickly outline at the end of my paper. Moreover, virtual fandoms have often been accused of 'diluting' literary theory and producing/perpetuating aesthetically questionable texts. As is in most corners of cultural studies, so is in analysing fan fiction – being appealing and easily accessible to the masses, and especially those comprised of girls/women and queer people, means bearing a mark of something suspect, something *lacking*. In other words: 'have fan studies unduly neglected aesthetic value and thus become complicit in the decline of literary quality and theory alike' (Ibid., 62). The inclusion of theory is an indicator of the importance of the medium in which criticism and analysis take place. For fan fiction, as it was just established, this medium is virtual – social media accounts, blogs, forums, websites, private messaging services, etc. The immediacy of fan fiction critique (both when it comes to commenting, analysing, or in other words, functioning as a literary critic, or writing fan fiction that functions as criticism of the original work) does its legitimacy no service, as most immediate reactions lack the very necessary component of deeper reflection (which can only be achieved with *time*). While I will not go further into the issues that arise in most online spaces where the ability to respond quickly or to churn out content (sometimes purely) for clicks, it must be said that, as is with any other artistic practice, there is a qualitative spectrum.

Another important aspect of fan fiction comes with thinking about its production and consumption – it implies that there are

at least two types of fans any work of art or popular culture might have. They can be defined as affirmative and transformative fans and both types are important for this analysis:

> Affirmative fans tend to collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyse, and critique. Transformative fans, however, take a creative step to make the worlds and characters their own. Furthermore, transformative fans are often critical of the texts (Hellekson and Busse 2014: 3).

Affirmative fans in this case would not only be the readers of origin texts, but also fan fiction readers, while transformative fans are fan fiction authors. The unofficial third type, mentioned by Sam Maggs in another context, would be a hybrid of these two – affirmative fans who consume the content transformative fans make, learn from it, and then become transformative fans themselves. Maggs claims that fan fiction authors are mostly fan fiction readers first, so they already have a good idea of what quality fan fiction looks like and where to find it (Maggs 2015: 77). Maggs' observation points to the fact that transformative fans are not the only ones being critical of the origin texts, affirmative fans are critical as well. This is in part why they consume fan fiction and why they ultimately decide to participate in its production.

As it was mentioned above, this 'reader-to-writer pipeline', if you will, automatically invites criticism related to the quality of fan fiction and to its 'no thoughts, just feels' tagline. Fan fiction is strongly positioned on the lowbrow side of the high/low spectrum, and even though the dichotomy is not so often used these days and it seems that some academic spaces have moved past it, that does not change the fact that fan fiction still isn't considered to be 'proper' fiction. On the one hand, this has to do with the question of originality – many detractors of fan fiction simply cannot get over the fact that fan fiction authors use another author's characters and imaginary spaces to create their own original plot lines.[5] On the other hand, this positioning of fan fiction is directly connected to its demographic. AO3 census data[6] from 2013 shows

[5] 'Non-commerciality and transformativeness are central to fan remix and the creation of fan communities.' (Rosenblatt and Tushnet 2015: 385). It is crucial to reiterate this thought as it is directly linked to copyright regulations, as well as the focus of this paper.

[6] For a more detailed review see: https://archiveofourown.org/works/16988199/chapters/39932349 (accessed 2 February 2024).

that the majority of authors and readers of fan fiction identify as women and genderqueer people, while other popular fan fiction platforms like Wattpad or LiveJournal are/were breeding grounds for teenage girls in particular, who wanted to author their first works or read adult, 'spicy' content involving their favourite characters or celebrities. Even though the most popular pairings involve cisgender white men, fan fiction is almost exclusively written for marginalised identities by marginalised identities.[7]

Finally, fan fiction is all about centring marginalised voices and these marginalised voices share a long history of having to prove their art is in fact art. Fan fiction is supposedly a type of text created with no revisions, no subtlety, no theoretical background, no working knowledge of the writing process. But even at its 'lowest', fan fiction follows storytelling patterns and uses narrative devices that allude to at least a cursory understanding of how literary texts work. Although Maggs assures her readers, a group of what she imagines might be future fan fiction writers, that fan fiction is all about pleasing your audience and letting your heart decide, she also directs them to a plethora of narrative patterns that can be used in writing (*Ibidem*). Which makes fan fiction sound like a legitimate pop-cultural genre at the very least, much in the vein of crime or romance novels.

Chapter II: Hyperproduction

What potentially sets apart both affirmative and transformative fans in fan fiction communities from other readers and creators is their productivity, and even more so the *visibility* of their productivity, as well as the apparent aimlessness of it. When it comes to writing, the productivity is easily tracked.[8] According

[7] Let me just digress here to mention that the ratio of men-loving-men texts to women-loving-women texts remains one of the sore spots of fan fiction. It invites the question of fetishization of queer men and the complete lack of imagination when it comes to queer women protagonists. I should add that queering the canon works much better once one actually immerses themself in the content and not merely relies on such statistics, as most characters – which means characters of all genders, protagonists and supporting characters in equal measure – are usually written as queer. Still, there is a lot to be said about why there is this undeniable obsession with men-loving-men content, but that should be approached in a nuanced way in a separate paper. For data on 2023 pairings (which are similar if not the same to the numbers from previous years) see: https://archiveofourown.org/works/49183780/chapters/124100074#workskin (accessed 2 February 2024).

[8] All examples from this point on are taken from Archive of Our Own, since it is the largest and best-organised website dedicated exclusively to fan fiction.

to AO3 statistics, up until August 2023 there were 346 710 works published in the top five fandoms alone. Whether they are oneshots (texts which usually consist of a single short chapter) or slowburns (texts that cross the one-hundred-thousand-word threshold), the sheer volume is a testament to fans' commitment and the hunger that readers of origin texts feel. Furthermore, every fan fiction author has their own profile or profiles and each work they publish has easily accessible basic information and statistics. Out of the many fan fiction authors whose works I regularly read and analyse, I would like to single out one of them to illustrate a key issue within the realm of authorial productivity. This fan fiction author is, to the best of my knowledge, completely anonymous and their social media presence is tied to a single pseudonym – lettered.

lettered has been publishing fics (fan fiction for short) on AO3 since 2005 and has been active in several fandoms – from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Schitt's Creek* to their currently most updated section which is the Harry Potter saga. Over the course of seventeen years lettered has written eighty-eight fan fiction works, some of which are thousand-word metafictional ruminations, and some are (several) novel(s)-length slowburns. Their works within the *Harry Potter* fandom often figure as a corrective to the source material, which is why I have chosen them in the first place. In the comment section of their most recent Harry Potter-related fic, lettered writes:

> I just feel, personally, that the canon itself has always been incredibly frustrating. It's about some very serious topics of bigotry and inequality that it fails to ever address directly, despite using the concepts as trappings for a hero's journey (lettered 2020).

Fan fiction, especially fan fiction written within such a deeply problematic fandom as the one lettered is referring to, functions as a subversive strategy. Many online commenters have argued that producing new works in such large quantities and attracting even more attention to a fandom whose main authorial figure perpetuates harmful racist stereotypes and openly shares her transphobic views online only causes further damage, but what the fan fiction community strives for is not ignoring the damage and revelling in the products of their hearts' desires, but rather facing or exposing the issues, and then offering the readers an alternative.

lettered reimagines the world of Harry Potter through several lenses: there is the obligatory queer romance[9] between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, the emancipation[10] of Ginny Weasley, deconstruction of the systems of oppression, analysis of positions of power and political implications[11] within the hidden wizarding community, introduction of trans characters,[12] etc. Readers do not come back to lettered's stories just because they are built on the foundations of their treasured wizarding world, but because they function as an in-depth analysis and critique of this world. (Also, because they are art.)

Even when lettered and many other fan fiction authors I have reading do not feel particularly productive or up to the challenge, there is a sense of obligation to finish a work in progress. For example, the last fanfic lettered posted was written specifically for a charitable cause named Fandom Trumps Hate 2019 and even though it took over a year to be finished, it ultimately helped raise over twenty thousand dollars for non-profit organisations.[13] Fan fiction thus subverts on several levels. Firstly, it betrays the capitalist ideal of monetising every single facet of one's life. lettered, as well as any other fan fiction author I have been reading, does not get paid in any shape or form. They have a day

[9] 'Trying to get Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy together is like trying to get toothpaste back into the tube: it doesn't fit and it's messy when you try.

I like to start by making them friends first. There are the usual short-cuts: bonding spells, Unctuous Unction, Veela mating rituals, that sort of thing, but I like to do it the long way. Then I have to ask questions like, why did Harry turn out the way he did? Why couldn't he and Draco be friends? What makes a friend, anyway?' (lettered 2011).

[10] 'It wasn't until I read the books, however, that I realized I was only a minor character.' (lettered 2012).

[11] 'Ever since MI13 and the Mage system had been established, Mages travel with a Healer. After the destruction of the veils, the status of Healers had been the most important stipulation in the Treaty of Wiltshire—Healers were sworn to protect Muggles. After the war the remaining Healers—as well as those who had become Healers as a result of the war, such as Aberforth and Draco Malfoy—all took an Unbreakable Vow. When Mages came to enforce wizarding justice, Healers came with them so that the Muggles knew they had nothing to fear.

Tambling had been in strident opposition to that section of the treaty, claiming that it stripped wizards' ability to defend themselves. Because it was only the Healers, though, the Muggle government for the most part disagreed. Wizardkind could do nothing but comply. They signed the treaty, and the Healers took their Vows.' (lettered 2014).

[12] *By the Grace* (2020).

[13] For an overview of donations see: https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fandom_Trumps_Hate (accessed 2 February 2024).

job, are in school, or live in precarious conditions, and come back to fan fiction in their spare time without the ultimate goal of using fan fiction as a 'side hustle'. Secondly, fan fiction reshapes and reimagines often deeply flawed worldbuilding. It does not set out to improve, but to expand. lettered's works are not didactic, but they tirelessly reveal the lacunae of the source material. Thirdly, fan fiction can make a tangible change. The money raised through fic-writing contests and other similar activities and events does not go to authors, but to the community. The productivity that is encouraged in online spaces can have a very particular goal of contributing to the real-world marginalised communities.

Productivity is also inextricably linked to the actual process of writing, not just the end product. While authors of literary fiction rarely give updates on their progress to their fans, and when they do, it is either to prepare the fans for another cycle of promotion of a new work or to stay relevant over the period between two projects, fan fiction writers never shy away from laying bare the conditions in which they live and write. They primarily communicate with their readers through author's notes that appear at the beginning and the end of each chapter and serve multiple purposes. What follows is an overview of several cult author's notes from various fandoms. Here I am indebted to drakiexoxo, a TikTok creator who archives and organises fan fiction marginalia and without whom I wouldn't be able to find many of the following examples.[14]

> **SELF-BETAd**. I'm rushing to get this entire thing posted before I lose power in the hurricane, so please, if you find any mistakes, let me know! I'll fix them when power returns (if we lose it, which seems likely)[15]

This author's note illustrates how fanfic-writing works within the community. 'Self-betad' refers to a specific way fan fiction authors create their works. Fan fiction is not just collaborative

[14] In the meantime, the Tik Tok creator mentioned above changed their handle to drakiexoxo and some of the saved posts containing authors's notes are no longer accessible. I am using both their Tik Tok page (https://www.tiktok.com/@drakiexoxo, accessed 2 February 2024) and screenshots still available on X (https://twitter.com/sigcookies/status/1447735663684640771, accessed 2 February 2024) as updated sources.

[15] Available at: https://twitter.com/sigcookies/status/1447735663684640771 (accessed 2 February 2024).

in the sense that it borrows from another author or that the community gives immediate feedback via comments. The process of writing is collaborative as well. Fan fiction authors tend to work with so-called beta readers, who could be their personal friends or colleagues, but more often than not are their online friends, people they have met through fandom and whose thoughts and analyses they appreciate. Beta readers serve as both editors and cheerleaders. They can provide technical help – correct the spelling or the sequence of tenses – they can advise the author when they are stuck, or even provide constructive criticism when characterisation 'feels off' or the main conflict isn't strong enough, but they can also provide moral support. If nothing else serves as proof that writing fan fiction goes beyond spilling one's wildest dreams haphazardly, then beta readers should be that clearest piece of evidence. Instead of a publishing team or a professional editor, there are usually two people who *maketime* to go through a text and who then get a shoutout in the author's note as a form of fan fiction currency. The value of beta readers is such that authors who write without beta readers tend to point this fact out, as it was pointed out above, because they are aware that editing and revision are crucial for the quality of any written text.

The other, eye-catching element in this author's note is the hurricane. The sense of urgency with which the note was posted suggests that posting the next chapter was more important to this author than worrying about the impending power outage due to a natural disaster. If the readership ever does find out about the precarious conditions in which certain mainstream works of fiction were created, it does so after the fact, when it is anecdotal. Talking about fan fiction production doesn't happen years after the actual writing took place. In most cases it is happening as the work is being written. What this does is draw attention to the fact that fan fiction authors have lives outside of fan fiction, that fan fiction does not cover their living expenses or help them brave hardships in any material way.

> Apologies for any mistakes in advance! My beta reader is still in jail and it's a struggle mailing fics to her. I'm trying to finish One Piece before she gets out so that's all I'm gonna post for a bit lol[16]

[16] Available at: https://twitter.com/sigcookies/status/1447735663684640771 (accessed 2 February 2024).

As it was with the previous quote, what stands out the most is the apologetic tone in the midst of an extraordinary situation. Fan fiction authors take feedback very seriously so there is a sense of guilt each time they aren't able to post their work in tip-top shape.

Aside from beta reading, another mode of collaboration are requests: 'SORRY FOR DISAPPEARING BUT I GOT ARRESTED BUT WORKING ON REQUESTS ASAP'[17] Fan fiction authors sometimes write on demand, based off of prompts readers give them in comments, which is maybe the most fascinating form of writing within a system that doesn't pay its creators for the labour they provide. All three of the cited author's notes prove that fandom provides opportunities that other activities may not because fandom encourages generative discourse — that is, each fan builds on others' work while contributing her own insights. The discursive nature of fandom permits fans to connect with others like themselves (Rosenblatt and Tushnet 2015: 388)

Finally, the following note highlights a previously-stated conclusion – fan fiction authors have a working knowledge of storytelling and key narrative devices: 'SORRY IF THIS CHAPTER HAD PACING ISSUES! I have been all over the place this week because I JUST GOT MARRIED TODAY AHHHH! Thank you for all the comments you've been leaving.'[18] This author's struggles with pacing cannot be overshadowed even by their wedding day, which only cements my point – producing fan fiction for nothing but one's own (and other readers') delight remains one of the most subversive tactics online writing has ever been able to employ.

Chapter III: Readerly appetites

When it comes to the productivity of fan fiction readers, I must mostly rely on their testimonies because statistics such as views and kudos might be indicative, but they are ultimately inconclusive. While the concept of a productive reader has been making rounds on social media for years now – its most recent iteration are book hauls and reading lists on BookTok – it has never not been linked to some form of external validation. Reading productivity has

[17] Formerly available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@drakiexoxo (accessed 5 May 2022).

[18] Available at: https://twitter.com/sigcookies/status/1447735663684640771 (accessed 2 February 2024).

been turned into a competition on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, and many complain that the extensive lists of books read in a week or in a month are putting further pressure on people who have joined these online spaces to find inspiration or motivation and to whom these goals are unattainable. Reading on the internet is done either for the sole purpose of showing (which for many also involves a certain type of profit) or to promote a certain idea of oneself (as an intellectual, a trendsetter, a member of the academia, an advocate…). Furthermore, reading, as presented on social media, often functions as an advertisement for *owning* books and is 'overrun by commercialism' (Pierce 2023). Reading *fan fiction*, however, has become a topic of open, mainstream discussion only recently. Fans who formed online communities in the 1990s and early 2000s rarely openly admitted their reading habits outside the fandom. There are hundreds of posts across various social media platforms dedicated to the shame fan fiction readers felt while engaging with fan fiction, not because it was often explicit or dealt with issues that might have been taboo at the time, but simply because it was considered trivial and banal. There are even more posts which describe what is considered to be, to quote fan fiction readers across TikTok, 'ungodly amount of time' spent on reading fan fiction.[19]

What I've mentioned already while defining affirmative fans is the hunger of fan fiction readers for more content because that is what the continuously high numbers of views and comments indicate. What are readers hungry for? Obviously, good romance and well-written porn, but also, and even more so, they're hungry for representation (seeing themselves where they were previously invisible) and diversity (seeing something well-known happening to someone omitted from the canon which makes the well-known somehow new again). This is why they are willing to invest their time into something that brings them nothing but pleasure. As fan fiction is becoming more and more talked about in academic circles and in mainstream popular culture, I suspect there will be

[19] It's interesting to observe here that authors of fan fiction suffer from a completely opposite affliction. As one fan fiction author writes: 'Me: Takes 14 months to write this story. Also me: Writes a 15 page term paper in one weekend with the flu' (Sharkmartini 2018). Writing fan fiction can be torture, as it is with all forms of writing when it is done with care and precision. Writing a short story in fourteen months is the farthest thing imaginable from merely 'spilling one's guts'.

less and less readers who read fan fiction for the sole purpose of enjoyment, and more and more utilitarian readers who can use fan fiction for profit.[20] Since the incipient phases of this paper, BookTok has churned out a whole universe of new tags and trends related to fan fiction readers – and these are always directly linked to profit.[21] Nevertheless, reading fan fiction turns the concept of productivity, which in the capitalist hellscape functions as an oppressive and toxic force (who can be productive and at what cost?) into a practice of resistance. Fans are reading, and doing it in large quantities, but often nothing comes out of it other than the comfort and maybe some sense of belonging.

On a final note, I want to reflect on the responsibilities mentioned in the introductory part of my paper. They are evident in the author-reader virtual interactions, some of which I have cited to serve as examples of other aspects of fan fiction writing and reading. I would like to propose that throughout the last decade there appeared new ways of being responsible towards one's audience. While online anonymity is largely considered to be a means to spread hate or misinformation without 'real-world' consequences (and, unfortunately, that is the case more often than not), anonymity within the fan fiction realm offers more a reprieve from abuse than an opportunity to be abusive. Fan fiction writers might use pseudonyms for various reasons, but they also continuously use tactics to protect their readers. They use tags to mark their content as triggering, they have elaborate systems of labelling their works as appropriate or inappropriate for certain audiences and they put in the extra effort to warn their readers of any potentially sensitive content in their notes. None of this is something they are obliged to do, yet they do it to ensure that their potential readers can make an informed decision. As it was shown through several author's notes, fan fiction authors care deeply about their community, which is why they apologise if something is not 'up to standard' and why they post on the day of their arrest or their wedding. If there is any business associated

[20] Imagine my horror when I first realised: I am one of the people who no longer devour slowburns in one sitting, but instead take time to annotate for *future reference*. I can, however, attest to this stark contrast that many fan fiction readers are describing – how easy it is to spend the night reading about your favourite pairing falling in love in any universe, and how difficult it is to read basically anything else.

[21] TikTok creators get paid by the number of views they get. The more relatable the content, the more views one gets.

with fan fiction production and consumption, and I know I am generalising here, it is the business of caring. Caring too much for the literary worlds someone else created, caring enough to keep them alive even if they are rotten, caring to the point of staying up all night and leaving extensive comments, caring so little about anything but this moment, right now, when they are typing away, and the hurricane is coming.

Epilogue

In conclusion, I would like to stress that my paper offered only some openings into the world of non-commercial (fan) fiction writing, which I would like to further explore, especially now that many of the authors that were active two or three years ago no longer visibly participate in particular fandoms. Since this paper was presented in Dubrovnik in 2022, the social media-based fandom culture has gone through several (hundred) cycles, trends, and revisions, all related to how we produce and consume content. I made a conscious choice to exclude much of the current anti-social-media-on-social-media discourse that would take my research onto a whole new plane. What I set out to do in updating the version of this text written in 2022 was to outline key elements of the current fan fiction landscape and to point towards some of their most subversive characteristics. Most of fan fiction writers and readers subvert the modes of operating in late-stage capitalism by taking the *time* to write and read without expecting or making profit. I also wanted to show how these activities are not vapid or simple wish fulfilment. Authors reread, edit, seek help and rewrite their fan fiction works, they take into account their readers' sensibilities, as well as criticism, and work on their craft. Similarly, readers use their analytical skills to propel discussions, write thoughtful reviews and voice their (dis)approval thus creating a discursive loop that, miraculously, remains largely untouched by any major industry. In this way fan fiction sites as AO3 remain (mostly) safe virtual spaces that maintain the idea of pleasure over profit, community over capital.

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Literature, Feminist Legacy and Theory



Ena Jurov, *How Do Women Live?*
(*Courtesy of selma banich*)

Feminism Revisited: How Did "Women: The Longest Revolution" Emerge? An Analysis of Juliet Mitchell's Classic Work

Biljana Kašić

Summary

How is the struggle against women's oppression interwoven with the concept of the political as a radical, critical change; through which corners of our contemporality does it arise; and what is the state of the Left in a time where 'the revenge' of capitalism's ruling class generates extreme inequalities between sexes/genders are some of the questions seeking articulation once more. On the other hand, why are theorists still lagging when it comes to collecting and representing feminist theorising in the sixties, which would help clarify some of the queries raised? It is a question that bears upon our approach to feminist legacy and modes in which feminist politics of that time might respond to newer feminist concerns.

The key issue is to what extent a revolutionary project of women's emancipation that was envisioned in this publication still matters. Taking the essay "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966) written by Juliet Mitchell as a stimulating departure for feminist positioning today, the author endeavours to elaborate further on the theoretical questions she posed, their relevance and their ambiguities. Furthermore, through analysing Mitchell's work as a guide for distinct articulation of women's position in the mid-1960s, at the crossroads of socialist vs. radical feminism in light of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in conjunction with a psychoanalytic lens and Marxist revolutionary ideas, the author offers a new reading of this classic text.

Keywords: Mitchell, sexual difference, revolution, second-wave feminism, liberation

Entry

"Women: The Longest Revolution"[1], the essay written more than half a century ago by Juliet Mitchell, one of the leading feminist and psychoanalytic theorists and the most influential figure of the second-wave feminism, is a remarkable piece of feminist work that continues to attract attention for many reasons. This essay functions as an unavoidable introduction to the themes central to the feminist thought and engagement in the revolutionary sixties despite a series of current 'troubles', especially due to critical blades pointed at the second-wave feminism[2] (radical feminism as a centre of affair, in particular) and their implications on exploringthose earlier feminist contributions. On the one hand, it mirrors the controversies of several feminist approaches or so-called waves at the crossroads of the vibrant feminist scene, while on the other, it clearly demonstrates why certain concepts such as oppression or sexual difference are crucial for understanding women's condition at that time. Primarily, the text[3] provides a clear elaboration of women's position in the mid-1960s at a critical juncture of socialist vs. radical feminism in light of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), whilst moving beyond their general assumptions, offering instead in conjunction with a psychoanalytic lens and Marxist ideas a new visionary project of women's emancipation.

In explaining the context of the appearance of this publication, the author's own subjective testimony is just as relevant as the feminist drive that characterises the Anglo-Saxon and French scene. It was a time that 'smelled' of possible revolutionary changes or something that could be defined as political;[4] the time

[1] Since its first publication in the *New Left Review* in December 1966, Mitchell's almost canonical theoretical essay was republished in the book *Women's Estate* in 1971. It is worth mentioning that this essay has been widely printed in anthologies and academic readers in many languages and used as a relevant theoretical resource extensively in Women's/Gender Studies courses.

[2] Second-wave feminism refers to the period from the 1960s to the late 1980s and is an umbrella term for critical thinking and a movement that appeared as a reaction to women's 'natural' roles as housewives and mothers after the end of the Second World War, and it brought to the forefront of feminist engagement the questions of male domination, the origins of oppression, patriarchy, sexuality, domestic violence, inequality at workplace, motherhood, reproductive rights, etc.

[3] I have to admit that this Mitchell's work seems to move me tremendously not only because of the feminist relevance of its topic nowadays, but above all fresh, entirely open-minded ideas that the essay leaves me with.

[4] Mitchell defined the political in the following way: "Political for us in the 1960s was such an inclusive concept, it meant radical, critical change, whether

of struggle for colonial independence and the increasing interest for the Third World countries by Western critical intellectuals, and at the same time the need to critically reflect on Marxism alongside existentialism and left-wing engagement in the theoretical milieu, was very present.

Juliet Mitchell herself belonged to the Marxist circle of intellectuals gathered around *The New Left Review* already in the early sixties, and the encounter with the works of Sartre, Laing, Engels, Cooper, Freud, de Beauvoir and then later, with Althusser, Lacan and Reich largely determined her theoretical habitus, and especially her critical reading of Marxism and psychoanalysis. Referring to her own analysis forty years later, she says:

> 'Women: The Longest Revolution' surveyed what was on Babel[5] and Engels, also using Althusser as a framework. Because what was important to Althusser about women was in the last instance the economic: getting an independence from ideological state apparatuses, so women obviously get both into ideology and into economics. Althusser was rearranging the Marxist map, which was very helpful. (...) I was using the Althusserian argument rather than a platform (Mitchell 2006).

But where are the women here, what really concerns them within a Marxist framework, and in what way are they articulated in Marxist analysis? And going further, how can women be a revolutionary agency within abovementioned social or economic register? These were the questions that captured Mitchell's attention and devotion and demanded theoretical clarification.

Being aware very early on that orthodox class analysis wouldn't work to entirely explain the deprived position of women, especially the multiple configurations (cultural and psychological, among others) of their subordination since 'Disembedding' economic structures from their social and historical conditions and conventions is, to paraphrase Butler, 'precisely the condition of economic formalism' (Butler 2013: 40) and thus insufficient and inadequate,

in the psychological field, the governmental field, the world field, and so on. It could be Red Brigades, it could be situationists. There was a lot of sectarian in fighting. But sectarian in fighting is a mark of tolerance in a funny way. It means you actually know that everybody is there. It was unlike the political field of the 1950s, which really did feel like being in a straitjacket." (Mitchell 2006)

[5] There is a mistake in the original interview. It is *Bebel*.

yet she considers some aspects of analysis valuable.[6] The issue of women's subordination is 'part of the classical heritage of the revolutionary movement' (Mitchell 1966: 1) and socialist vision as Mitchell emphasises at the very beginning of the essay. However, many aspects of the analysis in the works of Marx, Engels and Bebel did not explain how it can be really possible to transform woman's condition, and above all they placed emphasis on the economic sphere and evolution of property and connected woman's oppression with her physiological weaknesses and her reproductive role.

This Mitchell's work, along with a confrontation with certain Marxist assumptions about economic determination, economic 'primacy' and sex-blind analysis when women matter, simultaneously implies an engaged and ambiguous conversation which, according to the author Robin Truth Goodman in her text *Feminist Theory and the Critique of Class*, serves as a foundation for understanding why 'feminists tried to grapple with concepts like ideology, exchange, labour, and class struggle, and ask if and when they could be applied to oppressions in women's social conditions, collected under the umbrella term of *patriarchy*, or if women's forms of subordination were so culturally specific that they needed their own, independent rubric' (Goodman 2013: 131). The 'independent rubric', as Goodman precisely uses to explain the feminist agenda of that distinctive time, is at the heart of Mitchell's efforts and it encompasses both her theoretical and political engagement when it comes to women. In the meantime, she was involved with existential anti-psychiatry inspired by the work of Betty Friedan, namely her book *The Feminine Mystique*,[7] became involved in a Marxist feminist group in London and spent some time in America where she became familiar with the work of National Organization for Women (NOW),[8] which was the

[6] For example, Engels's statement presented in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, according to which the first oppression within the human species is that of the female sex by the male, is one of these insights.

[7] *Feminine Mystique* that emerged in 1963 resonated with women's needs and appeals at that time and was often credited with embarking on the 'second wave' of feminism which raised critical interest in issues such as workplace equality, birth control and abortion, and women's education.

[8] In the late 1960s women's rights movement in the USA took root at the same time as the civil rights movement, so women discussed not only about women's inequality, women's rights (including the right not to be sexual objects), but also about discrimination and the nature of equality in general in terms of college curricula, equal working opportunities, discrimination and sexual/racial/domestic abuse.

first organised women's movement at the American scene. As a founding member of the Anti-University of London in 1967 she started a seminar on women's issues which was a milestone for the beginning of women's studies in Great Britain.

The entire essay, which is the subject of my analysis here, written in Mitchell's precise analytic gesture, presents multiple reasons for the need for women's liberation. Appearing at a dense time of the awakening of multiple revolutionary and thought-provoking ideas, it powerfully corresponds and disputes with them in several ways. Along with varied intellectual guidances, what matters in terms of context is the political movement, transnational and global, that experienced its eruptive moment in 1968, and the formation of the women's liberation movement in particular.

In what follows I will try to explain a juncture of women's struggle against oppression with women as revolutionary agency, which is key to understanding what Mitchell presupposes under the phrase *longest revolution*, as they largely reflect and corelate to certain extent on what feminist theory at that time contemplates, analyses and challenges. Linking oppression of women with the problematic of agency I will also tackle Mitchell's thoughts on sexual difference, the issue that produces many constraints nowadays among feminists.

The power of insights one: addressing women's oppression

Bearing in mind the author's standpoint that 'it is only within history that oppression (...) has meaning.' (Mitchell 2005a: 354) I will start my analysis of this essay with the insight into the concept of oppression, in order to open up some of the questions that are places of feminist concern today. Looking back at that time which Juliet Mitchell (Mitchell 1966) in this essay described as a political struggle that crosses many tendencies: women's liberation, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, lesbian feminism, even traces of liberal feminism, what marks them all together is creative drive in the fight against the oppression of women. Thus, oppression of women becomes an identification marker that via its problematic sites articulates the sexual difference while simultaneously affirming the unity of subjugated women based on a common revolutionary goal, which is the liberation of women.

> By the time I'd written "Women: the Longest Revolution", in response to the Third World within one's own country, my question

> was, what were women, not being a class or race, doing here? "Oppression" was the word we used instead of "exploitation", because exploitation has a specific Marxist meaning as taking the surplus. And oppression was a catchy term used for Third World struggles and women as well (Mitchell 2006).

The author is quite precise in her elaboration why she introduced this term and what it meant for women. Oppression was a category that feminists came up with in order to establish the area of the revolutionary task not covered by other revolutionary theories or practices, Marxist in particular. It was a task envisioned for women's revolution both globally and women-specific. While exploitation in Marxist terms was, according to Mitchell, understood primarily as 'taking the surplus' which relates to capitalism, oppression, by counteracting the analysis of Marx and Engels, meant something else. Regardless of its stretched definition,[9] it means that it is not just exploitation that women experience or could experience in the world of production, but something else beyond capitalism that's happening here. Something that 'predates and postdates capitalism' (Mitchell 2015: 116) and that defines women's position and explains why sexual difference matters. Going further, it marks that it is something missing within the Marxist exploration according to which women in communist revolution will acquire by definition a full equality since they are part of the dominant revolutionary class. The Marxist feminists to whom Mitchell belonged to knew of that 'failure', that missing point. How could they achieve full equality without prior recognition as subjects ('what were women, not being a class or race, doing here', I refer to abovementioned Mitchell's words), and how could they be equal without rethinking and deconstructing the basis of their multiple subjugation?

Based on the analysis of the essay "Women: The Longest Revolution", there are two different yet interlinked points here I would like to highlight. The first is about the origins of women's oppression, which does not only have to do with the position of women in the sphere of production or labour market (advocated

[9] Mitchell called the term oppression also as an 'umbrella term', 'working title', 'descriptive title', 'a work-in-progress concept', 'interim term', 'a category with a political implication' in contrast to exploitation, but above all, something that was part of the political movement or, as she pregnantly described, 'It was a dimension of the political and intellectual baggage' of that time (Mitchell 2015: 116).

by Marxist theorists such as Engels or Bebel, for example), but, as the author emphasizes, includes all layers and spheres of oppression, including the family, sexuality, and reproductive system in particular.The second concerns the reasons for feminist politics, namely feminism that, as Mitchell argues, 'unites women at the level of their total oppression' (Mitchell 1966: 11), namely, it is 'all inclusive'. Here she specifically refers to the book *The Dialectic of Sex* written by radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (Mitchell 1966: 11-15).

Before I deeper analyse the positions of radical feminism and socialist/Marxist feminism, two significant feminist streams of that time in relation to oppression, it is important to point out some other features of that historical moment. Women's vital scene that gets its shape to more extent in the formation of the women's liberation movement (women's lib) was part of a wider global movement that was reaching its culmination in 1968. According to Brigitte Studer's analysis presented in her text "'1968' and the formation of the feminist subject" (Studer 2011), the movement, since the mid-1960s, introduced a whole range of topics signifying a fundamental critique of bourgeois-capitalist power relations and, although, it did not simply carry onthe oppression of women since sex/gender relations were often left undisturbed, newspaces for feminist engagement were invented. And the appearance of women's lib in the autumn of 1968 made a radical shift in this regard.

> The women's movement was what happened to 1968 – it went on. For me, what matters about women's movement is the Left; it is not that it is attached to the Left, it is the Left (Mitchell 2011: 2, according to Singh).

This Mitchell's statement published in an interview for *Platypus Review* 38 decades after the event shows very clearly and without any calculation how she posits the women's movement itself. To be precise - as an exclusively the Left (revolutionary) project, taking into account that the main demands of the movement at that time were those for equal work, pay, and conditions.

Regarding the oppression of women, Mitchell argues that women are exploited in the labour market as well as at home; namely, 'women are underpaid and exploited at work' as they are

oppressed by performing various household duties in addition to their derogated role in terms of reproduction, sexuality and socialisation of children. Also, to explore women's continued subordination Mitchell uses the Marxist concept of 'coercion',[10] referring to Marx's definition of "[treating] the slave or serf as the 'inorganic and natural condition of its own reproduction'''(Ibid., 18) and that might explain an ideology shared by both sexes. Her standpoint that '(...) the oppression of women is *intrinsic* to the capitalist system – as it is *not* to the socialist' (Ibid., 19) is the guiding thought throughout the entire work, and because of oppression and experiencing it, women, similar to workers or subjugated people under colonization, have an oppressed consciousness. Her insistence on the specific cause of women's oppression[11] leads her to address patriarchy as the system of male domination supported and carried out by capitalism, but also to the recognition of the concrete experiences of women, which explains why it is important to politicise the private.

Thus, in order to deepen the specific nature of women's oppressionand hence women's revolutionary role, the author didn't want to give up on the use of scientific socialism as a method of analysis; actually, it is quite present in a way of how she advocates for feminist consciousness based onthe concrete experience ofoppression, being aware at the same time that furthering dual opposition between radical feminists and socialist feminists would misrepresent the complexity of women's oppression.

But what are the places of agreement and even more, places of distinction between these two aforementioned feminist positions? Both radical and Marxist/socialist feminists, in addition to sharing some revolutionary ideas, criticised inadequacy of classical Marxist/socialist theory carried out by their 'abstract' socialist

[10] Also, she uses the notion of 'social coercion' in order to explain its interplay with the division of labour by defining unequal women's and men's work.

[11] Here I do not want to elaborate on the thesis on the hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination as the universal source of oppression of women, which is the starting point of radical feminists, and which is subject of criticism by some contemporary feminists, including Butler (Butler 1990: 3). Although Mitchell in her analysis relies on patriarchal foundations, she takes a different approach to the articulation of oppression, which will be evident from further insights.

protagonists, especially for lacking a comprehension of women's oppression and then the main reason of the revolt of women as the sexual class, too. But arguments in favour of major distinctions between radical feminists and socialist/Marxist feminists are mapped onto concrete experience of oppression as a result of male domination, ideological and psychological oppression or supremacism that have been historically transmitted through patriarchal institutions (workplace, family, politics, ideology, among others) and in that sense 'socialism has nothing to offer us' (Ibid., 19). As a counter position, socialist feminists build on the struggle against capitalism and private property, while insisting on women's liberation as part of a joint revolutionary struggle. The central focus of socialist feminism is to highlight how capitalism exacerbates the damaging impacts of patriarchal structures by providing sex/gender inequality and thus, capitalism, as the root of all oppression, must be challenged and replaced by a just, socialist economic system. The question of whether men are the ones who oppress or whether it is a question of the social male-dominated system which polarises these two groups of feminists, opens up in the subtext the issue of possible coalitions with other alienated groups, but above all the quest of what induces condition of women as a revolutionaryagency. There is no doubt that Juliet Mitchell supports revolutionary struggle as she grounds her feminist critique in Marxist dialectical materialism; yet, she does not pay particular attention either to the class question or class struggle as such, or to class differences among women.

With regards to the second concern, namely what are the fundamental reasons for feminist politics, oppression of women is certainly a main cause. In this view, it might be useful to raise the question in which ways such critical condition produces theoretical shifts and what theoretical challenges it deals with. Fighting against the first domination,[12] which is based on the division of labour between man and woman, has the characteristics of, metaphorically, 'poetic justice'. By using this metaphor for women's united struggle, she specifically refers to the intention of the book *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* written by radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (Firestone 1970) and its innovative analytical premises.

[12] It is important to note that socialist feminists and some Marxist feminists as well as radical feminists used the concepts of first and second domination to emphasize the primacy of sex difference over class difference.

She opposes to Marxism, whose historical basis is the economic determinism while radical feminism, from which position Firestone writes, insists on 'natural division of the sexes which proceeds it' (Mitchell 1966: 12). Making comparison between both subordinated classes (sexual and economic) Firestone argues that the overthrow of sexual classes similar as subordinated economic class (that is proletariat) requires the revolt of its underclass and that is women (*Ibidem*). Highlighting that the material basis for sexual division is the reproductive system as such, the author, according to Mitchell, went a step further from class analysis drawing attention to the benefits of technological advancement to ending the oppression including one of the biological family, while embracing feminist and ecological revolution might establish a kind of ecological balance (Ibid., 13). "What these women are demanding is not a superficial emancipation but the 'decolonization of women'" (de Beauvoir 1972), as how Simone de Beauvoir, an inspirational figure for feminists at that time, used to say about the women's struggle[13] in this specific context.

Necessity and desirability for women's liberation is actually the basic motive of Mitchell's feminist engagement. *Liberation*[14] is also a key word of the time, that was conceived as both political and sexual from the very beginning. It also contained a net of possibilities for utopian dreams and radical agendas which would enable the total redesign of public and private life contrary to the existing structures of oppression.

The power of insights two: addressing women's agency

How to confront subjugated, namely the second-class status of women and how to uncover the analytical and practical aporias which haunted sex relations are the questions that guided Mitchell in her theorisation of women's subjectivation or what the author called sexual difference. At first glance, three key postulates designed the body of arguments that she develops throughout the text in this regard. Firstly, women are fundamental and irreplaceable and thus the profoundly unique

[13] Also she very often used the word 'new feminism' for women's political and theoretical engagement in the sixties.

[14] It is interesting to note that Marxist feminists from communist/socialist countries preferred to use the term *emancipation* that corresponds with common Marxist terminology.

nature of women's subjection that is different from any other social group, is the main point of departure. Secondly, women are oppressed at home as well as in the labour market due to powerful family ideology and stubborn family patterns.[15] And thirdly, what matters here is woman's condition, that is both an analytical concept for unmasking multiplicity of woman's troubling positions and a significant mark that indicates and detects all areas of women's subjugated spheres, or in Mitchell's terms 'structures', and those are: production, reproduction, sex and socialisation of children. That means not only that a desirable change in woman's condition requires a transformation of each of these spheres, but the liberation of women can only be achieved if all four abovementioned structures that are intertwined, are to be fully transformed. Things are even more complicated considering that women's economic situation was full of contradictions accompanied by tensions among economic growth, liberal democracy, rationalisations, increased prosperity caused by modernity and social demands relating to women's domestic 'duties'. Famous women's duties!

Since the question of the subject is fundamental for feminist politics and therefore for the formation of women's agency, let's for a moment draw attention to two points here. One concerns the 'naturalisation' of women's domestic duties as a fictive foundation for femininity, and thus embedded, naturalised female roles, and the other concerns awareness of what denotes a women's common identity and what is both a site of empowerment and a site of contest. For Mitchell, as Jennie Eagle (Eagle 2018: 69) argues, it's not enough to claim that women's difference, presuming their familial responsibilities, namely 'duties', requires a necessary improvement in their social position in general. She took a more radical approach through which she actually demonstrated how the so-called natural is nothing but camouflage for ideological. So, women are trapped by the ideological and its discursive formations regardless of whether it is about motherhood, household duties or other social roles. By opposing not only to

[15] Namely, the modernising ideology of post-war family, apart from preserving unquestioned role of wife, strengthened motherhood particularly through the misconception of woman's reproductive role as 'the core of woman's natural vacation' (Mitchell 1966: 27), continued to maintain suitability of woman's traditional status.

the ideology contained in what is meant by 'true' motherhood or 'true' family, but also to the something masked in the word 'true' woman since the ideology of woman mirrors her as 'an undifferentiated whole', and besides 'eternally the same' (Ibid., 22), she touched on that trouble site of the ontological integrity of women's subject. However, different from the one addressed by Judith Butler in the book *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). What matters here is the concept of sexual difference, a key concept that the author introduces and develops in her entire work.

I will discuss Mitchell's articulation of sexual difference further below, after elucidating two interconnected concepts: oppressive condition and feminist consciousness. In order to become an agency 'We *do* have to experience the implications of our own oppression' (Ibid., 17). Similar to working class positioning, namely only by becoming aware of their own position, including the axis of their domination, women can address a critical appeal towards their liberation. By addressing that 'the personal is the political', and which is the basic matrix of the second-wave feminism, and radical feminism in particular, she indicates the material presence of women's lives, but certainly highlights the formation of consciousness-raising gesture towards the politicality of the personal. Therefore, feminist consciousness has a central place in this ('...the material with which our politics must work, if it is to develop', Ibid., 16), a turning point thanks to which the personal realm of women, their oppressed individual experiences become a potential for collective political struggle and thus the first step is politicising the personal (Mitchell according to Hollway *et al*. 2015: 120-124).

Sexual difference? Is it about a stubborn phallogocentric (patriarchal) order embedded in a binary asymmetry (male/female) that characterises Western epistemology, history, language, and law, or a system of domination of men over women to be overcome, or identity signifier for the woman question, or women's essential attribute that in Butlerian sense 'guarantees a presocial ontology' (Butler 1990: 3) of persons and/or social groups. However, it is a highly contested concept which may be seen even more problematic if viewed from the contemporary position to think and act both intersectionally and inter-, trans genderly. 'Everybody seems to be muddling up gender and sexual difference on me', declares

Mitchell a few decades after its introduction (Mitchell 2011: 5), noting how challenging and ambiguous the feminist theoretical horizon concerning ontological issues is.

Instead of an in-depth analysis, which this question surely requires, I will only refer to some insights important for this analysis. By virtue of psychoanalytic premises, Mitchell provided a distinction between sexual difference and gender;[16] thus, her analysis relies on it. Firstly, she took the concept of 'sexual difference' intentionally in order to explain the deprived position of women, especially within the sphere of reproduction, its myths and phantasies. While explaining the reasons for using this notion almost three decades later, she even more clearly put the emphasis on identifications, prohibitions and desires that 'the sexed subjects assume through their relationship to parents and reproduction' (Mitchell 2004) as their constituencies. By doing so, she actually highlighted heterosexual reproduction that is in the midst of the vertical (male/female) configuration. The modernist women's attitudes of the origins of sexual difference at that time put heterosexual division at the centre of analysis and political struggle, so feminism that had arisen in its second wave challenged that centrality. Not only through the demand for equality of positions, equal care for children[17] and responsibilities at home, but also through the 'sexual revolution' of the sixties, which put reproduction aside and thereby radically questioned heterosexuality. Secondly, gender, which at the appearance of the essay was not the subject of her analysis, is in her view, an earlier formation than sexual difference, namely, horizontal mode of sexuality shaped in lateral relation, separated from reproduction. Or, 'horizontal siblinghood' that she advocated in her recent reflective works[18], considering it more egalitarian and promising. Being aware at the same time that every society has its own vertical matrix based on the male-inclusive, namely fraternal contract. Make that much clearer, Mitchell uses 'sexual difference' for vertical relations while 'gender' for lateral relations. Vertical relations implicate, in her view, identifications with parents, and lead on to descent via reproduction, and in terms of father/man or mother/woman relations or divide, while gender deploys

[16] See: Mitchell according to Hollway *et al.* 2015: 126.

[17] Mitchell was aware, of course, that caretaking is not dependent on procreation neither on sexual difference but it is important to note that throughout history the difference itself is always expressed as interactive dependency with open or hidden sexual 'natural' mark.

[18] See: Mitchell: *Siblings: Sex and Violence* 2003b.

in its mobility both a component of seriality and thus continuity and openness as well as lateral recognition despite qualitative difference.[19]

In the last two decades, with the constant challenge to clarify the controversies surrounding the use of the notion 'sexual difference', especially in relation to the category of 'gender', Mitchell deepens and refines her argumentation without renouncing the concept of 'sexual difference'. Her preoccupation is, parallel to gender debate, to articulate arguments against current retrograde tendencies around sexuality that emerged via imposed backlash demands into the public that insisted on women's natural duties in terms of reproduction and mother-caring. Instead of procreation as an aspect of the coming out under the dominance of the patriarchal vertical model, she points to the significance of the horizontal axis, that includes relevance of psychoanalysis, namely extensive study into structural caretaking-roles and siblings as a counter concept to verticality of sex/gender division.[20] That leads us to one of Mitchell's most relevant insights which I will only mention here, and that is her approach to psychoanalysis and why it's needed for feminism.

Retracing shared history with the feminist artist Mary Kelly on a panel at the Institute of Art in London in November 2003 (Mitchell 2005b), namely almost three decades after appearance of the book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), once more she confirmed a feminist need for psychoanalysis at that time. Connecting the politics of feminism to the political potential of psychoanalysis, despite all controversies surrounding it, was, according to her opinion, necessary and productive since it offered an appropriate analysis of patriarchy available to feminism. Even if that 'venture' was often mistaken for an alibi of patriarchy itself, which she was well aware of.

But let's talk about this issue from another angle. In order to approach the problem of 'the longest revolution', as she argues in her book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* unconscious processes need to be understood. In other words, psychoanalytical insights matter. More precisely, they give us the tools to understand

[19] Complex psychoanalytical insight into the dialectical sibling relationship can be found in the aforementioned Mitchell's book: *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (2003).

[20] In 2005, as a lecturer of one of our doctoral seminars in Dubrovnik, Juliet Mitchell presented the topic of sexuality and siblings.

how femininity, masculinity, and bisexuality, for example, are imprinted within the unconscious and sexuality.[21] In addition, how the modes of women's oppression function since the term oppression signifies something more, something that women internalise and that has no reference to current social reality but, according to Mitchell's explanation, 'keeps 'coming back round' ' (Mitchell according to Walsh *et al.* 2015: 123). In short, something within the unconscious that relies on cultural/social imprints or archetypes (as a kind of hidden script keeping on the stubborn kinship structure, for example), and that can be activated or moved afterwards.

Although psychoanalysis is questioned within feminism relentlessly and persistently, induction of psychoanalysis here means unmasking an uncanny, vague and to great extent an inconceivable momentum, something that resides in a position of a woman, and despite a huge drive to change the unjust patriarchal world, pulling women backwards all the time. No matter how far women go forward, there is an inherent pull backwards, highlighted Juliet Mitchell, when explaining why she entitled this essay she published in 1966 *Women: The Longest Revolution* (Mitchell according to Walsh *et al* 2015: 118). The longest here signifies both: the potential length of the revolution (it will take time!)[22] but at the same time , the emphasis on the notion of 'afterwardness'[23] or 'nachträglichkeit' she used here, indicates that, if I would paraphrase the author, the first event (unconscious momentum) emerges only with the second event, namely as 'deferred' effect activated under repression (Mitchell according to Walsh *et al* 2015:118).

'Historical present': on Mitchell's legacy and women's longest revolution

How to revisit Juliet Mitchell's thoughts on the women's long revolution today? With what critical lenses? Or going further, how

[21] Judith Butler, analysing Juliet Mitchell's concept of sexual difference, finds exceptionally relevant her insight that heteronormative ways of organising sexuality that are transgenerational are not necessarily a conscious operation. (Butler 2012: 1-19).

[22] 'The fight against women's oppression as women is, after all, without a doubt, the longest revolution' (Mitchell 2011: 2).

[23] Here she used Laplanche's notion of 'afterwardness'. See: Laplanche, Jean 1992. *Seduction, Translation, Drives*.

to set up Juliet Mitchell's legacy or dialogue within the 'historical present' as a basis for feminist imaginary forward? Of course, there is no simple answer. However, there is no doubt that "Women: the Longest Revolution" is a foundational feminist text of that time that functions as a political manifesto with certain specific sites due to its Marxist and psychoanalytic (a)venues.

In short: "Women: the Longest Revolution" brought to light the ambivalence of the socialist feminists on the Left towards 'woman's question' by addressing women's oppression as a key term 'inherently distinctive' from the Marxist term 'exploitation' and, secondly, along with Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963), it explicitly denaturalised male supremacy by defining it as ideological. Mitchell clearly states the linkages between ideology and power by introducing patriarchy as a relevant concept for a system of social structures and ideologies that constitute male domination and oppression.

This essay, in a much broader sense, gave an exceptional theoretical outline of how to achieve women's liberation and why there is no short way around it. Oppression requires a long way. By demonstrating how the situation of women is governed by various contradictions around their positions of exploitation in the economic sphere (industrial modernisation including its automation and economic growth didn't, for example, solve the problem of women in the workplace) as well as those within the household fields, domestic life and sexuality. Namely, sexual liberation didn't free women of repressive sublimation, as Mitchell pointed out later on. In addition to complexity and contradictions that its content conveys and some unfathomable insights, this essay brought the promise of change.

Yet, how can we evaluate its contribution? How can we make a space for acknowledging this particular feminist legacy? How to formulate the political task of contesting the current oppression of women? Through which critical lens? And, finally, what are the frameworks for building collections today revisiting feminist engagement then, and to what extent are feminists nowadays rooted in storytelling and ideology of that time? On the one hand, we could reflect on potential inputs of its theoretical premises situating them in wide-ranging dialogues that place these years in feminist meetings, writings, or the trajectories of feminist exchange. Certainly, issues such as oppression, liberation or

reproduction as 'mimicry of production' (Mitchell 1966: 30), if I could use Mitchell's term from the essay, are crucial incurrent debates in the fields of social reproduction, emotional labour and politics of affective economy thanks to many influential thinkers such as Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Christine Delphy etc. So as her reflections on women as sexual objects within dominant patriarchal patterns, hypocritical morality, marriage contract and oppressed sexuality as well as sexual freedom that is an inseparable concept from equality, women's desire and free choice.

What seems particularly interesting to me is how we can address the issue of the 'woman question' today in the context of feminist debates on the Left and crossing the East/West feminists divide as well as various discussions relating to the critique of capitalism and possible liberation within the framework of global economy. The main question that concerns feminists nowadays is whether it is possible to abolish or replace capitalism having in mind contemporary antidemocratic configurations of power and omnipresence of capitalist vitality regardless of revolutionary desire or one's own commitment to emancipatory vision. And what does Mitchell's longest revolution mean in this regard? Political philosopher and feminist Wendy Brown in one of her interviews, reflecting on positioning on the Left towards a possibility of a revolution, is seemingly both sceptical and ambivalent.

> At this point, I have to say, I don't think it is possible to really imagine a form of substantive political freedom, self-governance, and radical democracy without that. Nevertheless, we had better get busy doing that imagining, since, in the very near future, we are neither looking at the overthrow of capital, nor at its collapse from within (Brown 2006).

In the context of neoliberal expropriation of labour and ruins of capitalism, economic dispossession, neo-colonial ventures, increasing politics of affective economy and its implications primarily upon women and migrants, accompanied by disturbing antifeminist streams, this essay encourages us to reflect again on what the feminist struggle against women's oppression means today and contributes to the political as a radical change, as well as what makes feminist political responsiveness possible.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an outstanding critical thinker, dealing with aporias around agency and subalternity, is fully

aware that ongoing postcolonial subjection, oppression and dispossession are further legitimised, normalised and regulated through neo-colonialism and its modes of global functioning, as women from the global South have become subjects of the transnational capital flow. Her critique of subject formation and implication of transnational capital in confrontation with finance capital and how it affects women in this regard (for example, micro-credits given to so-called poor women) is of exceptional analytical importance here. So, a question that arises, regarding the women's position inherent in matrices of various forms of dispossession, oppression and subjugation (male-centred, capitalist and neo-colonial) could be articulate in this way: How might claims for women's liberation be addressed having in mind international frame of oppression(s) and its different geopolitical situatedness, and at the same time simultaneously work in favour of women, and counter the racialised and sexualised economy? In order to answer this question, in my opinion, we need to 'check' to which extent women can cover all features and claims set before contemporary critical agency. Mitchell's hope in the achievement of the women's revolution, and her embedded desire to move forward in this direction, is somehow spoiled with a kind of pessimism, or rather scepticism. Even at that time, despite her own enthusiasm, she was aware of many obstacles on the women's emancipatory path. Certainly, the context affects its meaning, then and nowadays. But most importantly, we have to see how to articulate feminist critical agency today knowing that, on the trail of Spivak's recent reflection '(...) for the revolution is never over, so, we can never claim a 'post' ' (Spivak 2017).

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Living to Curse: The Strange Case of *Kate Sucurizza*

Lada Čale Feldman

Summary

By paying homage to the locality in which our seminar is taking place, my intervention will endeavour to interpret one of the strangest plays Croatian literature has ever produced: I say 'literature', because Vlaho Stulli's *Kate Sucurizza*, written in Dubrovnik around 1800, was not put on stage until after its much later archival discovery, in the second half of the 20th century. Upon its first performance in 1966, it was promptly labelled as "undoubtedly one of the most interesting early modern Croatian plays". Indeed, this "cactus flower" of Dubrovnik playwrighting appeared as unprecedented in its unusual twists of comedy's setting, atmosphere, genre, characters, structure and (foul) language. Knowing that its author was a confirmed Jacobin, interested in thematizing the life of the lowest class of the Dubrovnik state in the European post-revolutionary era, critics remained puzzled by the play's bold amorphousness, but did not hesitate to shower it with the most anachronistic poetic and stylistic attributions one could imagine, from realism to naturalism to anti-drama and the theatre of the absurd. While emphasising Stulli's focus not only on the female protagonist's cursing rage, but also on issues of marriage, embodiment, motherhood, and the family violence that poverty generates, my aim is to demonstrate the transformative power of a feminist reading for the historical re-evaluation of this curious piece. Its (post-)revolutionary impact will here be re-framed not only against the background of the gender ideology propounded by contemporary French and Italian family dramas and comédieslarmoyantes, but also in terms of its virtual meta-theatricality, brought to light by the play's uncanny resemblances to Georg Büchner's

play *Wojzeck* (1837), the dramatic masterpiece known worldwide that provoked strikingly similar critical confusions.

Keywords: Vlaho Stulli, *Kate Sucurizza*, Georg Büchner, *Wojzeck*, feminist reading

I guess the allusion in my title would be transparent to those of you familiar with Shakespeare studies, new historicism and the work of Stephen Greenblatt, but for those of you who may not be that interested in early modern drama, let me just point out that it paraphrases Greenblatt's famous title *Learning to curse*, in which the American scholar actually alludes to Shakespeare's Caliban, a character from *The Tempest* who reproaches to Prospero for having him taught a language in which he, Caliban, is free only to curse (cfr. Greenblatt 1990). As a dark-skinned, monstrous inhabitant of the island which Prospero landed on and took hold of in *The Tempest*, Caliban has since become the emblematic figure both of colonial undercurrents of Shakespeare's opus, and, or even more so, of postcolonial approaches to his opus, new historicist ones included. The protagonist of the play I am about to discuss could at first sight stand for nothing of the sort, being a white woman born in the 18th century Dubrovnik, a little aristocratic republic on the south of Adriatic - a woman whose family, as she phantasies in the play, may even have been of distant noble origin, but is now sadly degraded to the lowest of Dubrovnik's estates. Kate Succurizza - for that is the name of my character - is nevertheless a subaltern monster of a kind for the society, the epoch, and the theatre she happened to be invented in: with all her eventual command of a language spoken in her native town and the right to use it that was supposedly granted her by birth, she still uses it exclusively to curse, as insistently as if she were driven by an insatiable, spiting *jouissance*. That is why, for many a theatre historian in Croatia, the discovery of the comedy in which Kate appears provoked quite a puzzle: after a rather ambitious project of transposing the entire Molière's opus and the French playwright's rhetorically dense, sometimes even expressly convoluted phrasings into Ragusean language that marked the first part of the 18th century Dubrovnik theatre repertory, such a return to autochthonous playwrighting at the end of the Enlightenment must have come as a shock even to Kate's contemporaries, no matter how well versed they were in stratified linguistic registers of various drama genres that used to flourish in the relatively rich tradition of Dubrovnik Renaissance and Baroque drama.

The invocation of the curse as a subaltern language of potential resistance is however not the only inverted connection to the new historicist explanatory framework one could draw when attempting to solve the strange case of this play. As is probably already almost worn-out to remark, new historicism often builds its approach to literature through recourse to a seemingly wholly unrelated contemporary document inadvertently shedding light on some aspect of the fictional universe under scrutiny. In the case of my Kate Sucurizza, there is no need to search for such a documentary illustration very far: there are archival findings "proving" that a certain Luko Sucurizza - Kate's husband in the play – was appointed to the function of the corporal-guardsman of Dubrovnik city gates, and that his poor family lived on the premises of what all the current tourists coming to Dubrovnik know as today's Peskarija (cfr. Bošković, 1977). The family was obviously in dare need of financial support, for it is quite a curiosity to read in these same documentary sources that the official of the City's public health, a certain learned nobleman VlahoStulli, a man with firm Jacobin convictions, became godfather to Luko's grandson, while also having found in the whole family, which he had a chance to inspect from such a close angle, an unexpectedly appropriate subject matter of his dramatic imagination. That is how on an unknown date around the year 1800. Stulli's indignation with Dubrovnik's pauperised marginals brought to the world his one and only play, which to this very day seems to elude all endeavours to explain the utter fascination it generated among scholars of Early modern Croatian drama, against all critical odds. The play dramatises the last 24 hours Kate's daughter Mare spends in the overcrowded house of her alcoholised parents, brothers and sisters before leaving it for good after being married to a young sailor appropriately named Tikvulin (which literally translates into "Thickhead"). The critics' puzzlement is all the more interesting if we have in mind the unanimous diagnosis of all of them that this, "without any doubt one of the most interesting of all early modern Croatian plays" (Batušić 1978: 168), belongs to naturalism *avant-la-lettre*, being in fact a disturbing "slice of life", or, as one critic endeavoured to succinctly summarise, "a carnalesque, compressed event caught from the horror of reality" (Jeličić 1978: 145), rather than a dramaturgically complex representation of it.

So far so good, one could say, if at the same time some of these scholars did not feel the urge to proclaim the play to be avant-guard

anti-drama, more in line with Ionesco's and Beckett's absurdist poetics, indeed, a thoroughly contemporary piece, a true "theatre of cruelty" (Grljušić 1978: 156). The scholar and director who discovered its manuscript, Marko Fotez, took responsibility to designate it a "comedy," suggesting however as anachronistically as the critics mentioned above that its relational structure and dramaturgical devices could even be compared to Edward Albee's *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Fotez 1967: 633), but nobody followed his lead, at least not in more detailed corroboration of this bizarre hypothesis. Even the critics who were willing to deal with the features *Kate Sucurizza* eventually shares with the European drama production that preceded it or was contemporaneous to its appearance made unsubstantiated claims about its poetics being analogous to, as one of our historians poetically formulated, "yearnings of a part of European dramatists of the late 18th century" (Novak 1984: 332), although the dramatist he had in mind turned out to be a certain Italian, Giovanni Gherardi de Rossi (Novak 2004: 243-244), who wrote indeed numerous satirical comedies of the time, but whose characters are all rich and corrupted fellow Romans and have nothing to do with the misery Kate's family suffers.

European theatre historians pretty much agree upon one thing, namely that, to paraphrase one of them, the German historian of political theatre, Sigfried Melchinger, the 18th century European drama did not produce a single play that truly resonates with the French revolution, which means that would bring pauperized and despised "multitudes, masses, plebs'' on the stage, for, no matter how inclined to revolution individual authors of the period may have been, they all stuck to depicting intellectuals and the general aspirations of the third estate, not the fourth one, that initiated the storming of Bastille (Melchinger 1989: 262-264). The only author that Melchinger acknowledges as the revolutionary playwright on all, ideological and poetic accounts had yet to arrive on literary scene, though, just like Stulli, not on the literal stage, and it was Georg Büchner, the author of *Wojzeck*, a play that generated strikingly similar confused reactions among German scholars, equally obsessed, just like the Croatian ones with respect to *Kate Sucurizza*, to edit the text and find its "rightful'' narrative logic, establish its philological integrity and postpone its interpretation to better times, which, to be sure, arrived a decade ago with a general renewal of interest in Büchner's work (cfr. Fortmann and Helfer 2012; Gillet, Schonfield and Steuer 2017). Discordant however in

their classifications, the critics attributed to Büchner's piece traces of both enlightenment and romanticism, existentialist anxiety, and nihilistic disengagement, equally claiming that it fits much better into expressionist avant-guard, deserving in many ways to be called the precursor of the whole modernist transformation in the field of drama (Buckley 2006: 120-122). Curiously enough, Büchner's play likewise stemmed from documentary sources: its author also had something to do with public health, since he was a student of medicine, and was also disgusted not only by the poverty of low classes but more specifically by the way the judicial system treated Wojzeck's real life prototype, having hanged him after denying his lawyer's plea of insanity and thus proclaiming the delusional man responsible for murdering his wife (cfr. Steinberg and Schmideler 2006). Both Stulli and Büchner wrote plays which were considered to be lacking a distinct line of action, well rounded characters and clear motivations for their actions, which were, at the time, required ingredients of a proper bourgeois play. Just as Stulli could hardly be said to have written a comedy, for his play elicits pity and horror, even if Kate's daughter manages to get married at its end, and nobody dies, so also Büchner challenged his epoch's definitions of tragedy by making his poor soldier a tragic protagonist and thus defying the centuries-long Aristotelian generic laws (cfr. Steiner, 1979: 187). But before I return to this stimulating, and, as I hope I shall succeed to demonstrate, most fruitful analogy between the two plays, let me however ponder a bit longer upon the intriguing unreadability of *Kate Sucurizza*'s supposed mimetic, realistic or naturalistic transparency, humour and provisory "happy ending".

Unlike the deranged wife-murderer in *Wojzeck*, the humbler follower of Shakespeare's Othello, the protagonist of Stulli's play is quite a formidable female character, thoroughly unprecedented in the history of Croatian drama, which by that time featured mothers only as tragic queens such as Hecuba, and, in comedy, mostly as bystanders, comically begrudged by their son's foolish marriage plans, never as helpers or enablers of their daughters' marital prospects. Moreover, Kate Sucurizza seems to strongly deviate from the place accorded to mothers in the two cultures Dubrovnik had most cultural contacts with at the time, Italy and France. Drama repertories of both of these - as much as, for instance English fiction of the time - started to give to mothers a much more prominent place than was the case before, but mostly insofar as they successfully propounded the newly emerging 18th

century ideology of "the good mother" and other prescriptions to women regarding their domestic duties and deference to their husbands. We all already know that old litany, which was consolidated precisely during this period in multiple social discourses of domesticity: women were supposed to be dutiful, religious, economical, modest, chaste, well behaved, charitable and sensitive to the needs of others. This idealized image that served as cultural shorthand for standards of female behaviour, was meant to be applicable to all women, regardless of specific situations or subject position, and it relied upon a well-known geography of space, sharply distinguishing the privacy of home from the open space of public engagement.

Since works of fiction were expected to reinforce the gender codes of the period, valorising women who embodied the characteristic of the domestic woman and demonising those who did not, Marivaux, Nivelle de La Chaussée and Goldoni excelled in what was then called *comédie larmoyante*, which put an emphasis not only on harmonious conjugal and domestic relations, but also on prudent and benevolent parenthood in general. Authors however particularly focused on conscientious mothering of daughters, which was at the time considered by philosophers like Fénelon or Dancourt to be important in political terms, as a "mirror of the larger Enlightenment project" and therefore crucial for social reform. Mothers were expected to enter into almost homoerotic intimacy with their daughters and to compensate with their understanding for eventual deceptions encountered in marriage, as well as with their warmth for emotional wounds inflicted by unfaithful husbands. Hence titles such as *L'Ecole des mères* and *La mère confidente*, *La brava madre*, *La madre amorosa*, which all suddenly brought forth the protagonist function of both a cunning and a caring mother striving in one way or the other to manipulate their daughters into either emotionally or at least financially secured marital unions, sometimes even, as in Goldoni's *La madre amorosa*, to the point of sacrificing their own erotic aspirations.

Nothing could be more remote from this ideological and dramatic paradigm than the happenings we witness in Stulli's *Kate Sucurizza*: instead of encountering a harmonious and prosperous bourgeois household, we realize from the very start of the play that the family is in thorough emotional and financial disarray. The first exchange between the wife and the husband is a quarrel over the wine Luko brought home, undermining again Kate's hardship

in making the ends meet. The only plot here is constant plotting of family members against each other, either to steal the father's money and wine, or to avoid household chores. Sisters shout at one another and beat each other, then the mother intervenes and beats the elderly one, denying her dinner, in which the girl then pisses in revenge. When the other children taste the meal, protest and insult the mother for being drunk herself, she is explicit in her wish to strangle them all, reproaching her husband for not being able to support the household as befits a proper father, then simulating falling from a heart attack. The second act seems to engage in some action, for a woman neighbour arrives to negotiate a marriage of the elder daughter Mare to a sailor with whom the girl in question already fully consorts, in all implied meanings of the word. Both parents are hesitant, for they doubt anyone would want to marry their daughter, knowing that they can't provide any dowry and being suspicious that she is as dissolute as a prostitute, as her mother used to be. In fact, there is not even a decent corner of the house in which the contract of marriage could be properly sealed. It is now turn to the father to lose its temper and faint, but as there is nothing a good drink could not solve, he is quickly brought to his senses. Only for a moment, since the couple starts again to fight and jump at each other's throat, and the children join them, lashing out however primarily on their drunken mother. In a sudden stroke of genius, Luka, the father, symbolically decides to bleach the whole house, and the entire family seems to be enlivened with joy for the pending marriage. In the last act, the family is so pressed by the preparations for the notary who must come to visit them that the youngest son falls down the stairs and breaks his nose, which engenders another round of mutual reproaching, shouting, and slapping. The father supposedly goes to the town in order to buy some paper but spends all his money on drinking, so that, upon his return, Kate is forced to make him vomit. Last amendments are made to the bride's outward propriety, the sailor arrives, and Kate seems to be endeared by the young couple – indeed so endeared, that she offers them a drink and even starts acting coquettish with her future son-in-law. The notary finally enters "the smelly den", as Mare, the daughter, does not hesitate to call her home, and the contract is happily sealed, albeit with some wavering over the sum to be paid to the groom and the time needed to gather it. Kate is hurt by the notary's prompt departure, for she did all she could to make herself appear to be of fine breeding and knowledgeable in matters of legal and ceremonious communication. Finally, the

daughter leaves with her now legal companion, and is greeted by her parents' clamorous forgiveness, tears, and blessings.

We must immediately note that, while not exactly fulfilling the role of an ideal mother, Kate is not depicted as being a demonic one either. One clearly sees – and that is obviously the main reason the play was perceived to announce naturalism – that her dare circumstances shaped her character, even though one must also admit that her portrayal somewhat surpasses these justifications, as if precisely and methodically to spite all the attributes of a good mother that we enumerated before: not only is she aggressive to her daughter, explicit and obscene in her allusions to the daughter's physicality and future sexual life, but she also constantly dismisses her daughter's chances for happiness, claiming that she herself is much prettier. Almost homoerotic intimacy mothers were supposed to establish in order better to control their daughters' emotional choices here acquires a much more vulgar tone, for we hear from the girl's father that Kate revels in Mare's early gained sexual experiences, if not downright prostitution, and praises her daughter for thus following her lead. So how come that this "simple, if not simplistic" play (Batušić 1975: 38), as it was commented upon by precisely those who, at the same time, found it "most interesting", could have been experienced as overstepping the boundaries of mimetic representation and manifesting avant-guard, absurdist, anti-dramatic features and sensibilities?

I shall endeavour to offer two answers to that question, which, just like the deviant characterisation of the protagonist, also simply require a feminist framework in order to be adequately addressed. The first answer concerns the play's curious way of insisting on its own medium of expression, for, as I mentioned in my introduction, what critics primarily stumbled upon was the relentlessness of play's foul language, of characters' constant obscenity, cursing and swearing, imprecations and maledictions. Far from being just a parodic reversal of all the generic expectations of a bourgeois comedy of manners, or *comédies larmoyantes*, to whose obligatory tears the finale of *Kate Sucurizza* obliquely refers, the play thoroughly challenged, or better to say broke with, the linguistic decorum inherited at least to a certain extent from French classicism by using each and every opportunity for enunciation given to its characters to develop a whole spectrum of the cursing idiom – from animalistic reductions of the opponent in the dialogue via references to bodily functions of ingesting, digesting and excreting to finally, the most direct sexual imagery of both hetero and homo-sexual practices.

Of course, one could argue that cursing and other vulgarisms pertain to the well-known arsenal of carnival merriment that Bakhtin so deftly analysed in his famous treatise on Rabelais, pointing to their connection with the vitalism of cosmic and collective body, endlessly renewable in ineluctable cycles of physiological and seasonal change (Bakhtin, 1968), which, according to Northrop Fry (1957), also informs the pattern of all comedic plots. We have seen that Stulli's play in many ways does fit this pattern governing the action of a comedy, for it does depict Aristotelian "people worse than we are", its action does involve a young couple in a way obstructed in their romantic aspirations by their elders, and the play does end in a marriage, as Menander's formula requires. As a matter of fact, the play also contains elements that confirm its participation in the imagery of the ever returning and ever renewing cosmic and bodily cycles: this is namely perhaps the right moment in my lecture to inform you that Kate is not only a mother of three when we make her acquaintance, but that she is also pregnant, for we learn at one moment that her pregnancy is the only thing that prevents her husband from hitting her harder. Yes, Stulli's comedy partakes of grotesque realism, not, however, the merry medieval and early renaissance one, but rather the one pertaining to its later modifications which, according to Bakhtin himself, came with the individualistic degeneration of its imagery into dark and pessimistic tones of an anxious and embittered subjectivity (Bakhtin 1968: 302).

The crowning figure, however, of this transformation in linguistic usage of the aforementioned bodily tropes in Stulli's play, its most eloquent embittered subjectivity, is not only a woman, but also, as I said, a pregnant mother of three. Such dramatic circumstance sharply contrasts with what theoreticians of cursing call "the wholesale, systemic phallocentrism, that is, the masculine principle of the curse" (Užarević 2012: 179), especially the one consisting of sexual imagery and the use of the verb "to fuck": "for a long time, swearing was in the social sense, exclusively a 'male thing'" something "created by men for men" and "flourishing in typical male spaces", so that, as the Russian semiotician Uspenskij says, "swearing in women's mouth is perceived as a phenomenon of sexual travesty" (Uspenskij, 1994: 110, in Užarević 2012: 179). One may object that in *Kate Sucurizza*, everybody curses and swears, but it only confirms the power of "the mother tongue" to contaminate the whole family universe, since Kate is, as I said, by

far the most insistent and the most imaginative producer of curses and swears in this play. I will not dwell any longer on the variety of her lexical choices, since it would be rather difficult to translate them and rather tedious to go through all the situations in which they appear, let alone to list all the targets of her verbal attacks, but there is a distinction I did not make so far that should be discussed.

Namely, cursing as malediction or imprecation and cursing as swearing or using vulgar sexual words, which both populate Kate's rich linguistic arsenal, are not quite the same thing, especially if we look at them from the angle of their supposed phallocentric prerogatives, although they definitely intermingle from the rhetorical standpoint. To be more precise, a curse as malediction or imprecation, as opposed to simple obscene swearing, is a speech act that preserves traces of its ritualistic, magic function and is throughout literary transpositions more associated to women as supposed holders of irrational, magic powers: hence such female figures in fiction as offended fairies in folk tradition, and witches or dethroned queens in Shakespeare, who by their curses exert revenge on those who inflicted them some injustice. But this fictional power of the curse as an exemplary performative in the sense Austin attributed to this term refers only so firmly to the woman's accursed subaltern position, if we take as its prototype the bad fairy from the *Sleeping Beauty*: "even in malediction, where cursing makes perhaps its greatest claims for the efficacy of voice, that voice is dislocated and divided, while its effects are at once inevitable and unpredictable"; its fantasy is "that the body shaking with infirmity, indignation and spite can generate a voice so powerful as to translate outrage into vengeance, disrupting the narrative of its own exclusion. It would thus seem possible to see the malediction in utopian terms; in the absence of effective forms of redress, the curse returns justice to the living body, whose aliveness and claim on justice are indicated precisely by its cursing voice" (Brown and Kushner 2001, 545-546).

Unfortunately, and most appropriately, since the curse is an event that remains constitutively incomplete, striving to void the future of anything like futurity or difference, nothing can be magically restored or redressed, and the kind of temporal suspension the offended fairy generates in the fairy tale could be said to govern Kate Sucurizza's impoverished world as well: the tragic impact of the play consists in the fact that she repeatedly curses her own daughter, thus undercutting the chances of rectifying her losses in the happiness of the next generation. But

there is more to Stulli's preoccupation with cursing and swearing as his characters' main linguistic resource. Curses, as we heard, dislocate and divide the one who enunciates them in at least two ways: first, by harbouring "fantasies of immunity to circumstance at the moment that circumstance presses most closely and affords least dignity", for the curse disavows it, depriving the subject of "anything like self-possession, self-presence and self-sovereignty" (Ibid., 549). Second, the power of the curse is derived from a "taboo that has accrued to the words like cunt or fuck over time", which means that these words are "most emphatically not owed but only voiced by the speaker: they cannot confer subjectivity and empowerment, but they can lend force to the aspects of language that exceed message, like volume, timing, tone, rhythm, emphasis and patterns of sound repetition" (Ibid., 550) – in short, the non-referential, poetic side of language, which especially comes to the fore in the actor's oral interpretation of lines in the play insofar as they figure as a prescription for performative use.

Besides obviously fascinating our critics with that aspect - what Freud would certainly call *Vorlust*, something that could ease the audience's mechanism of repression - *Kate Sucurizza*'s relentless cursing opened up however another avenue for an insidious attack at Dubrovnik class structure, and at its indifference if not aversion towards the new, revolutionary winds coming from across the shore. Since the curse rhetorically belongs to apostrophes, which means that it always invokes a third party in "the little dramaturgy" entailed in its oral emission, the curse firmly asserts itself as a scenic moment (Berndt, Meixner and Mahler 2016: 604). Stulli profited of this dramatic and performative quality of the curse by making it reinforce his main political weapon: the play's metatheatrical indictment of spectating, of looking at another's misery, and it is this critical avenue that Stulli's play crucially shares with Büchner's *Wojzeck*.

Let me therefore briefly return to the analogy between the two plays that I drew earlier: Büchner's hero, or anti-hero, is a famished soldier, selling his own body to a physician experimenting with effects of the famine on human physiology. Wojzcek is namely given a meagre recompense in return to his agreement not only to become the object of the physician's scrutiny, but also to be displayed like an item on a fair, like monkeys and other curiosities that were exposed to the public eye in a newly emerging fashion, or should we say, gout of the 18th and early 19th century for inspecting the impenetrable Others to the Human nature. The

enlightenment is a time of science and scientific experiments: indeed, as Joseph Roach (1993) and Claudio Vicentini (2012) have abundantly demonstrated, even acting regained its lost dignity both as profession and as art due to the fact that it proved susceptible to research and analysis, if not due to being itself, as Diderot in his *Paradox* suggested, a kind of research and analysis of the world that acting was deemed to represent on stage. But above all else the epoch promoted critical spectating – subduing all the mentioned Others to the intruding and invasive eye, voracious to know, learn and enjoy. Büchner clearly alluded to this correlation between scientific instrumentalization of people for the purposes of experimentation on the one hand, and, on the other, the experimental situation of the theatre itself, in which his hero, for the first time in the history, appeared as a human specimen without a correlative in the audience, since lower classes so far appeared only in highly conventional roles of servants, never as protagonists suffering a tragic fate of their own. By redoubling the frame of its stage and making the hero become the "case" around which a discourse is developed without any respect of his own needs as a human being in its own right, the playwright took the very voyeurism of theatre to task, provoking an unprecedented unease that marked the advent of theatrical modernity, if not even, as Benjamin Bennett claims, a kind of revolution (Bennett 2005).

There is in *Kate Sucurizza* a strikingly similar moment – marking the very centre of the play's strangely suspended movement from the beginning to end – in which the crisis of the family reaches its peak, everybody is fighting and crying out loud, the drunken Kate cursing and swearing more than anybody else, and in which a stage direction introduces unnamed "crowd" surrounding the family's house, peaking into it through its windows and shouting at Kate, crudely and unforgivingly: "You drunkard! Now I know that probably there are some of you who may think that my comparison with Büchner is perhaps far-fetched, and that we could hardly call this shouting to be representing the voyeuristic gaze of Dubrovnik oligarchy, but if I tell you that Kate answers with a cursing wish to drench out the crowd's eye, which is a unique formulation in the entire play, I suppose you would agree with me. Furthermore, besides being the archetypal trope of drama and theatre, the drenching of the eyes could just as easily be connected to one of the recurrent historiographic tropes connected with the storming of the Bastille, the 'so-called 'special cruelty' of women, the 'furies of the guillotine'"(Outram: 127), as

they were named: with all its projected misogynistic displacement of violent instincts onto the female body, in the play the allusion to this trope functions intertextually, reminding the audience of their own material vulnerability and the risks run by their own sadistic and oppressive voyeurism.

Kate Sucurizza is, I argue, a revolutionary play in both senses of the term: it is the first one in the history of European drama, at least to my knowledge, to fill its discursive and performative space with outbursts of the resentful, raging, aggressive, cursing eloquence that storms out of the body of a pauperized and humiliated pregnant woman, a mother of children without future. Its connection to avant-guard practices is not, however, or at least not exclusively, to be found among the likes of Jarry, Beckett, Ionesco or Adamov. Her unknown companions in the artistic practices of modern times are more likely to emerge from drawings of the American artist Nancy Spero, whose title *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck you* from the year 1960. resorts to profanity in order to voice her attack against the "overall regime of interdiction" (Buchloch in Nixon 2007: 10) that according to the artist denies the very existence of the maternal subject as a speaking subject. As for more recent Stulli's counterparts, I must say I was struck by the extent to which Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Black Venus* (2010) – which insistently stages inner performances of Sara Baartman's abuse as Hottentot Venus while framing them by the director's intrusive camera's eye – corresponds to what was Stulli's attempt in the first place, to make his co-citizens uneasy about the very ethical and political conditions in which they were about to look at his *Kate Sucurizza* while comfortably seated in their city theatre, some 200 metres away from her home. No wonder his play was never performed during his lifetime, and that he never wrote anything else for the stage, secretly hoping perhaps that the spines of his "cactus flower", as the play was called by our scholars (Grljušić 1978: 154), shall protect his play from oblivion.

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The Utopian Horizons and Pitfalls of Normative Male Camaraderie in Meša Selimović's *The Fortress*

Slaven Crnić

Summary

Theoretically grounded in the fields of masculinity studies and queer theory, this paper analyses the literary and political significance of masculine (non)normativity in one of the most celebrated Yugoslav novels, Meša Selimović's *The Fortress* (1970). Set in Ottoman Bosnia, the novel follows its protagonist and narrator, the young war veteran and aspiring poet Ahmet Šabo, as he comes to grips with the harsh realities of post-war disenchantment and poverty. What becomes crucial for Šabo's survival in an increasingly complex and dangerous political situation is a group of fellow men that offer him help and solidarity. In the following paper, I will analyse the ways in which *The Fortress* reimagines the utopian promise of a corruptionless world as critically dependent upon this camaraderie of normative men. I will also argue that the novel splits the male homosocial continuum by equating the corrupted world of hierarchical power with male queerness. Finally, this paper will map the detrimental effects the establishment of normative male camaraderie has on women and queer men, revealing its utopian horizontality as a new normativity for everybody else.

Keywords: normative masculinity, queerness, male homosociality, camaraderie

In masculinity-focused scholarship, one of the most often-used tools for thinking through and researching masculine normativity

has been the concept of 'male homosociality'. Originating in social sciences, the concept of 'homosociality' refers to social relations and practices between persons of the same sex (Sedgwick 1985; Haywood *et al.* 2018). While the concept could, in principle, denote homosexual or otherwise non-normative relations, it has mostly been used in research focusing on predominantly or exclusively normative male-dominated social arenas. As a consequence, 'male homosociality' has been conceptually mostly tied to the notion of heterosexual masculinity and its inner social dynamics, one of which is the constitutive patriarchal exclusion of women and homosexuality:

> A popular use of the concept is found in studies on male friendship, male bonding and fraternity orders. It is also frequently applied to explain how men, through their friendships and intimate collaborations with other men, maintain and defend the gender order and patriarchy. (Haywood *et al.* 2018: 56)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) remains arguably the most influential theoretical take on cultural and literary representations of 'male homosociality'. With a focus on the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth-century English literature, Sedgwick retraced various ways in which historical forms of male homosociality, homosexuality and homophobia entered and shaped canonical works. Drawing from Réne Girard's work on the triangular structure of male rivalry[1] and Michel Foucault's work on the history of sexuality, Sedgwick theorised male homosocial relations as a continuum radically fractured by the modern invention of the category of the 'homosexual' and new forms of homophobia. While conventional usage of 'male homosociality' in social sciences excluded homosexuality from consideration and focused predominantly on gender-based social practices between normative men, Sedgwick argued in favour of conceptually redressing male homosociality as always-already including homosexuality.[2] Her rationale for this theoretical manoeuvre was

[1] In his *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Girard (1965) argued that classical plots of male rivals competing for a beloved woman were not actually structured around the central female character but were in fact set in motion by the fascination and emotional investment the two male rivals hold for each other: 'The hero sees himself in the rival he loathes' (Girard 1965: 300).

[2] Sedgwick proposed the concept of 'male homosocial desire' to emphasize the isomorphic structures of subordination of women and the oppression of

the structural capacity of modern homophobia to manipulate 'the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution' (Sedgwick 2016: 86).

Contemporary scholarship originating within masculinity studies has recently begun to revisit existing accounts of male homosociality. As the sociologists Hammarén and Johansson (2014) argue, the critical emphasis on the negative role male homosociality plays in the maintenance of the patriarchal gender order simultaneously obscures forms of homosociality that are based in inclusive and nonprofitable relationships such as intimate friendship. To imbue theory of homosociality with a more dynamic and comprehensive outlook, a conceptual differentiation has been introduced between two orders of male homosociality, that of vertical/hierarchical homosociality on the one hand, and horizontal homosociality, on the other:

> Hierarchical homosociality is similar to and has already been described as a means of strengthening power – of creating close homosocial bonds in order to maintain and defend hegemony. … Horizontal homosociality is similar towhat was earlier described as female homosociality. This concept is used to point towards relations between, for example, men – relations that are based on emotional closeness, intimacy and a non-profitable form of friendship. There are, clearly, no absolute boundaries between these two approaches to homosociality. Aspects of hierarchical homosociality in horizontal relations and vice versa might be present, but making a distinction between them and discussing them separately makes it easier to analyze different aspects of the concept and highlight different implications. (Haywood *et al.* 2018: 67)

While used mostly in social sciences-based masculinity studies, in this paper, I will use this contemporary theoretical distinction between vertical and horizontal homosociality to probe the ways in which male camaraderie forms the political horizons in Meša Selimović's 1970 canonical historical novel *The Fortress* (*Tvrđava*). Set in Ottoman Bosnia and narrated by its main character, a young

homosexual men in heterosexist patriarchal societies. By introducing 'desire' to the concept of male homosociality, Sedgwick did not mean to implicitly postulate an underlying or latent homosexuality as a cause or an effect of homosocial patriarchy. The point was rather to emphasize the *structural* nature of male homosocial bonds by introducing the notion of 'desire' in a way that was 'analogous to the psychoanalytic use of 'libido' — not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force' (Sedgwick 2016: 2).

war veteran and aspiring poet Ahmet Šabo, the novel mainly revolves around several key male figures: a heretic student directly opposing the elite's teachings and political power by fomenting revolt among the peasants; a bereaved father who seeks to avenge his son's death by using his wealth to loosen the powerholders' grip on the locals; and a group of war veterans trying to navigate the harsh social climate and face their own disappointment with post-war life.

I use the term 'camaraderie' for two reasons. First, by the term 'camaraderie' I subsume the linkages established between *The Fortress'* normative male characters that directly oppose, as we will see, male queerness and are, furthermore, driven by a shared political purpose. Whether during traumatic wartime experiences or in a joint attempt to survive the disappointing reality of post-war poverty, men connected by this camaraderie aim not only at ensuring mutual survival in dire circumstances, but also at transforming the social and political fabric at large. It is within this context that their relative homosocial horizontality – or, in other words, deliberate non-hierarchical structure – actively opposes the hierarchical, vertical structure of the political elite. The second reason for using the term 'camaraderie' is that it echoes back to Selimović's own life and times. During WW2, Meša Selimović joined the Yugoslav Partisan struggle, first as an activist in the National Liberation Movement (Narodnooslobodilačkipokret), and later becoming a commander and a political commissar of the Tuzla Detachment of the Partisan Army (Selimović 1976; see more Hoare 2013: 126-130, 257-260). In this sense, I use 'camaraderie' to point towards the textual traces of the kind of collective guerrilla-style, make shift tactics of survival, and the deep sense of respect and admiration Selimović held for the many selfless, grounded and self-sacrificing Partisan fighters he met during WWII (see more Selimović 1976: 110-166).

Although nominally a historical novel, *The Fortress* is explicitly critical towards Yugoslav socialist state apparatus and contains many direct autobiographical elements that connect the author with his narrator. As Andrew Wachtel pointed out, the practice of using the genre of historical novel to allegorise and critique contemporary societies was widespread in 20th century socialist states. What makes *The Fortress* singular is that, unlike all other socialist-era critical allegories, the novel does not even try to avoid anachronisms and, furthermore, uses its historical setting purely as decorum (Wachtel 2010: 110). Selimović scholarship has

isolated a plethora of textual elements that are unabashedly out of place in this presumably historical novel. Everything from the novel's historical setting[3] to its usage of language and references[4] has been demonstrated as idiosyncratic and anachronistic. For instance, as Wachtel further pointed out, the characters' mindsets and intimate lives often sound distinctly modern. Furthermore, the depiction of the war and the character's attitude towards it (and their own country) is 'obviously anachronistic and reflects a 20th century sensibility, not an 18th century one' (Ibid., 110). From the perspective of literary theory and history, all these elements – deliberate subversion of historical novel's genre conventions, the autobiographical connection between the author and the protagonist, and the thematization of a disappointment with the post-Enlightenment modern state apparatus – highlight the importance of *The Fortress* in the South Slavic context as a proto-postmodernist novel (Kapidžić-Osmanagić 2012: 11-12). All of these elements are also best exemplified by the novel's central figure, the young aspiring poet and impoverished war veteran, Ahmet Šabo.

[3] For instance, most critics have identified the novel's battle at Khotyn as being the literary depiction of either the 1621 or 1673 real-historical battles. However, both Robert Hodel (2011) and Andrew Wachtel (2010) recently pointed out that the novel's historical context is probably that of the late 18th or even early 19th century. For one, there were several battles fought at Khotyn during the 18th century Russo-Turkish war. The novel also contains many other textual traces that seem to point firmly towards the 18th century as its historical setting. For instance, the novel mentions the Ottoman ruler named Abdulhamid (both Abdulhamids ruled in 18th century), the insurgent Morić brothers (executed in 1757), and Selimović himself had stated that the novel was first envisioned as being about (and partly modelled upon the writings of) the chronicler Mullah Mustafa Bašeskija (1731 or 1732-1809) (Wachtel 2010; Hodel 2011). However, none of the historical elements congeal into a coherent representation of a verifiable historical moment.

[4] In one of the novel's most famous scenes, the rebellious student Ramiz stands what basically amounts to a show trial *in absentia*. The language used by the ulema congress to accuse him of inciting religious heresy and social upheaval is actually a linguistic anatomy of the inner workings of a politically motivated show trial. As critics have shown, even the scene's vocabulary – with the usage of terms such as 'narodni vođa' ('people's leader'), 'policija' ('police'), 'narodniprijatelj' ('friend of the people') – explicitly invokes the times of Tito's Yugoslavia, rather than Ottoman-ruled Bosnia, etc. (Rotar 1973: 206). Thus, Prohić (1988) considered the ulema episode as an especially poignant literal transposition of Stalinist-type politically motivated proceedings into literature. This has also led some critics to recognize in Ramiz the figure of the famous Yugoslav dissident, Milovan Đilas (Wachtel 2010: 114). While acknowledging allegoric valence of the novel, Andrew Wachtel also warned against reading the novel as a simple *roman à clef*, and insisted that it combines several semantic levels, including a universalizing critique of modern state power.

(Non)Normative masculinity and the (in)corruptibility of political power

Šabo has been revered as an ethical giant in Selimović's critical reception, with one critic poignantly describing *The Fortress'* hero as 'a poet by spiritual needs and original vocation, a moral rigorist that strictly separates right from wrong, and ethical dignity from moral failure' (Prohić 1988: 52). In the *Author's note* to *The Fortress'* first edition, Selimović himself explicated a crucial way in which his hero represented an ideal solution to the novel's overarching problematics of the corruptive nature of power:

> [Šabo] knows that it is hatred that divides and destroys us, whereas the only thing that can sustain us is love, or even just a belief that any sort of mutual understanding among individuals and in a community is possible. Guided by this belief and yearning, he remains cheerful and morally untainted. (Selimović 1976: 214)[5]

Unlike other of the novel's characters that neither forget nor forgive the injuries they have suffered at the hands of corrupted political leaders, Šabo seemingly detaches himself from his wrongdoers and pursues a deliberately simple-minded life, devoid of vengeance and plotting. His simple-mindedness thus amounts to a deliberate choice to disentangle himself both from seeking vengeance *and* from attaining political power. In fact, it is precisely the incessant calculations inherent to power struggles that Šabo primarily alienates himself from. For Šabo, power is a situation of disingenuous strategizing, founded in strenuous intellectual activity, and inherently in proximity to malice. For instance, this is how Šabo describes the town's political leadership:

> What a life these people led! What an unremitting strain, the calculation of every step and of every word, the fatiguing consideration of the possible moves of an opponent! What a torment, what a waste of life! What little time or opportunity for normal human thinking and feeling, for caring for anything beyond oneself and one's danger! (Ibid., 262).

Embodying these aspects of political power is Džemal Zafranija, the novel's main antagonist, most heavily featured in the novel's chapter 'Enemy's land' which revolves around

[5] Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian to English are mine.

the crucial scene of Šabo's reception with the town's elite. After a lengthy process of coaxing, Šabo's boss, the notary Mullah Ibrahim, finally manages to get the city's powerholders to invite him and Šabo to one of their fabled reception parties. Ibrahim's goal would be, in today's vocabulary, networking: he aims to establish lucrative connections with the local elite. Just before arriving at the party, Šabo's mood is fouled by an encounter with Muharem the flag-bearer, once a soldier, now a beggar: 'I gave him some small change, feeling ashamed: ashamed because I was going to the dinner. It was his place to be there, not mine. Before and above all others' (Ibid., 54).

Šabo's agitation grows exponentially upon arriving at the party and meeting his former schoolmate Džemal Zafranija. There are many unnerving qualities to Džemal. His general sneakiness and unreliability are signalled by his bodily properties. Almost blind, Džemal squinted through glasses, 'but he used his ears as eyes' (Ibid., 60). Šabo's dislike for this nauseatingly sweettalking, disquieting man reaches back to their schooldays in the madrassa and is now amplified by the fact that Džemal works as a notary for the *kadi*, the magistrate. Džemal's ambitiousness is something Šabo finds repulsive, even though he does exhibit some sort of sympathy for Džemal's childhood hardships:

> He was like water. He'd no form of his own; he'd adapt himself to any vessel he was poured into. Nothing disgusted him if it was useful, for he had one and only one aim in life: to succeed, to escape the memories of a poverty-stricken childhood and of a father who was a prison warder, a drunk who'd spy for anybody, who died despised by everybody, and whose son turned even this family tragedy to his own advantage … He was calm, self-controlled, dangerous. He knew how much people feared him, and he enjoyed this with a smile of satisfaction. (Ibid., 61-61)

It is precisely at Džemal's ambition and thirst for power that his life history and sexuality intersect. Already tipsy when he encounters him at the reception, Šabo makes an innuendo regarding Džemal's homosexuality as 'this man's only vice':

> I recalled what was being said of him, half-laughingly and half-admiringly. Namely that for a year he'd been the lover of the rich haznadar[6] Feyzo, partly in order to have a powerful protector but mainly because he wanted to marry Feyzo's daughter, who would

[6] Treasurer.

> bring him a fair dowry … But I knew one thing: he disgusted me. His smile made me sick. (Ibid., 62)

Following Šabo's provocation, the two men engage in a short back-and-forth about the nature of vice and evil that culminates when Džemal asks Šabo:

> "You mean that everybody has the job of deciding what's good and what's evil?"
> "Everybody! And no evil can become good just because the majority accept it."
> "Is defense evil? Defense of one's faith, for instance?"
> "Defense is often aggression." (Ibid., 63)

Unbeknownst to Šabo, now quite overtaken with his alcohol-fueled moralizing, Džemal slowly walks him over to the central room where most of the guest have gathered. Džemal then falsely warns him that he is lucky the reception guests – 'our best people' – have not heard his words about defending the faith. Enraged, Šabo replies:

> "Best? Did you see the *bayraktar*[7] Muharem on your way here? The best people are probably those who are starving or dying in prisons".
> Then I noticed, by the look of delight that he tried to conceal with apparent embarrassment and by the sudden deathly silence, that he desired nothing more than that I should say this! That was why he'd led me into the middle room, without my noticing. That was why he'd encouraged me, counting on my drunken pride that I'd blurt it all out, like a fool. (Ibid., 64)

Unable to stop himself, Šabo gives a little speech about the futility of war and the way his comrades, and thousands of others, perished on battlefields that had little to do with them. He then concludes: 'And if they'd come back, they'd probably have had to beg, like *bayraktar* Muharem. It's not enough to think only of our own good' (Ibid., 65). The repercussions to Šabo's mindless outburst will be swift and grave, afflicting his personal and public life alike, causing him to be effectually socially ostracized.

At the moment he realizes just what sort of calamity he has brought upon himself by inadvertently offending the city's elite, Šabo thinks to himself about Džemal:

[7] Flagbearer.

> Damn him for the bugger he was! He'd made an ass of me, as a whore would. Beware of pederasts, Smail Sovo used to say, or perhaps it was somebody else. I'd got to ascribing everything to dead comrades. And that somebody had also said: Those who don't hide it, they're not so bad, but those who do are the worst shit of all. Why did I have to prove it on myself! (Ibid., 66-67)

If Šabo, in the light of the previously analysed dichotomy between strategy/power/corruption and simple-mindedness/action, personifies the moral side of this dichotomy, then Džemal embodies its dark, corruptible counterpoint. Šabo's judgment over Džemal is moralistic in nature and repeatedly enveloped in visceral homophobic disgust which, in the context of *The Fortress'* central problematics, attains a political importance.

As Sarah Ahmed argued, the affect of disgust operates in the immediacy of the contact zone between subject and object, with the disgusting object carrying on its surface a history of its own 'badness', triggering the subject to pull away from its stickiness:

> The body recoils from the object; it pulls away with an intense movement that registers in the pit of the stomach. The movement is the work of disgust; it is what disgust does. Disgust brings the body perilously close to an object only then to pull away from the object in the registering of the proximity as an offence. (Ahmed 2010: 85)

Disgust is thus almost an alarm system that blares against the viral quality of bad objects, against their ability to stick to us, to turn us bad as well. It is precisely disgust with Džemal's sexual proclivities that defends Šabo from being seduced by his sweettalking.

Džemal, Šabo's peer of similarly humble origins, can be seen as Šabo's antipode. Voluntarily accepting strategizing and scheming as ways of ascending the social ladder, Džemal ultimately surrenders himself wilfully to corruption. This corruption makes him do unimaginable things such as using brute violence and even murder against those who endanger or oppose him. Male queerness and corruption are synonymized here since Džemal's political and economic power is directly connected to his love affair with the wealthy merchant Fejzo. Of note in this regard is a scene in which, in complete opposition to Džemal, Šabo refuses to become Fejzo's sexual object as a means of ameliorating his position. The following example will underline not just the way in which morality and heterosexuality become synonymous in

Šabo's case, but also the way in which the novel echoes its time of writing.

Following the disastrous reception, Šabo engages in a series of desperate attempts to shed the newly acquired status of the social pariah. On one such occasion, Šabo visits Fejzo the merchant, Džemal's protector and lover, in his shadowy carpet-adorned and incense-scented shop. Although the merchant immediately proceeds to caress and smell Šabo's palms, it takes some time before Šabo realizes what Fejzo is truly proposing to him. Fejzo is a figure compiled out of sheer excess and triviality, completely overtaken by consumption of goods and men, spoiled by carnal pleasure. Fejzo offers Šabo the keys to his shop and his 'friendship'. Before abruptly leaving the lusty merchant's shop, Šabo spills his disgust:

> Should I strike him across his trembling chops, so he'd remember the day he brought me into his stinking lair? Or should I get out of it without a quarrel, safely? I'd had enough of hatred and conflict. (Selimović 1999: 100)

On a final note, Šabo asks Fejzo whether there are many of these 'friends' who help each other out, to which the merchant replies: 'Come and see for yourself. We don't desert one another' (*Ibidem*). Despite the straightforward portrayal of his homosexuality, Fejzo is by no means a simplistic figure since he reflects, I argue, an amalgamation of Yugoslav Partisan sexual ethics and Orientalist tropes.

As the historian Franko Dota (2018) recently demonstrated, the Yugoslav Communist Party promoted a strict moral comportment among their members both in their official roles and private lives. As an answer to European conservatives' and Fascist propaganda during the interwar years that sought to taint their opponents' image in every aspect[8], Communist sexual politics was one of the ways in which in which the Party fought to maintain a spotless picture of the brave, self-restrained and virtuous Communist fighter. Josip Broz Tito was writing already in the 1930s about the importance of a Communist's control over their private life:

[8] In the interwar period, European conservative and fascist political movements attempted to contain the Bolshevik revolutionary turmoil within Soviet borders by, for instance, depicting communists as sexual offenders, libertines, promoters of 'free love' and abortion, and destroyers of the traditional family (Herzog 2011: 49).

> Every single member of the Party has to be impeccable in his private life. His political work cannot be separated from his personal life. This is a paramount condition that a communist has to fulfil in order to gain the trust of the masses. Disheartened men, drunks, blabbermouths, *debauchers* etc. have no place in the Party. (Tito in Dota 2018: 130; original emphasis)

The Party was thus given the power of surveillance over their members' private lives and punishing those who have committed trespasses such as adultery. It is of note that Selimović himself felt the severity of the Party's strictness when he was expelled from the Communist Party for having committed adultery. The Party's intrusiveness and policing left an indelible mark in Selimović's memory[9] and there is a distinct autobiographical connection between the kinds of hardships Tijana and Šabo have to endure and Selimović's life with his second wife, Darka (see more Selimović 1976: 224-230). There were also other, more severe punishments for sexual trespassing, especially for queer men, and Selimović must have been familiar with some of them, including the rationale and ideologemes fuelling the persecution of homosexual men.[10]

An interesting example of Orientalist ideologemes surrounding male same-sex sexuality and socialist sexual ethics comes from the memoirs of Milovan Đilas, one of the leaders of antifascist movement in Yugoslavia. Đilas recounted his dilemma on what was to be done with a young Muslim Partisan fighter, who was outed as a homosexual. After serious consideration, Đilas thought it wisest to expel this young man from the Party and was later happy to hear that the youth has bravely perished in the battlefield. When confronted with his 'vice', the youth admitted having been corrupted by a wealthy bey in his adolescence, a piece of information that somewhat ameliorated his position with his superiors. On the one hand, the idea of a youth-defiling bey tapped into the Orientalist ideologeme, at the time widespread

[9] In his memoirs, Selimović recalled: 'Members of the organization, and especially comradesses, asked me reproachable, distastefully indiscreet questions ('What exactly did you talk about? Did you kiss? What else did you do?' etc.) When I had enough, I angrily said: 'If you think you'd have your way with me, think twice.' I left the meeting embittered. I was expelled from the Party, and later got fired from my job' (Selimović 1978: 223-224).

[10] In 1944, a prominent Partisan communication officer was court-martialled, sentenced to death, and executed by a firing squad for having maintained homosexual relations with his subordinates and thus, as was stated in the verdict, corrupting them. His verdict was sent to all Partisan units and read aloud to the fighters, making his case a well-known cautionary tale (Dota 2017: 65).

in Yugoslavia and the Balkans in general, that ascribed 'the vice of sodomy' to the Ottomans' moral and sexual corruption of local poor peasantry (Dota 2018; see more Škokić 2011). On the other hand, it tapped into a vulgarized version of Marx's and Engels' writings on homosexuality, popular among the leftist circles in the first half of the 20th century that 'believed that homosexuality stemmed from a decadent and aberrant social order, that it represented bourgeois individualism and aristocratic hedonism, and was completely at odds with the interests of the morally and physically healthy working classes' (Dota 2018: 132).

We can see both ideas at play in *The Fortress'* depiction of homosexuality. On the one hand, Šabo's disgust at Džemal Zafranija's and Fejzo's sexual proclivities are framed by a reconfirmation of his own sexual and gender normativity and, hence, impeccable moral authority, virtual incorruptibility, and absence of any decadence. On the other hand, Džemal and Fejzo's relationship is constructed around the notion of a poor youth (Džemal) and a debauched wealthy man (Fejzo) who seeks carnal pleasure at no expense. And on top of it all, Fejzo is described in distinctly Orientalist overtones so as to differentiate his "Turkish vice" from Džemal's more opportunistic motives for a homosexual liaison. In fact, as Šabo voices the town's gossip, it is often presumed that Džemal beds Fejzo only to acquire the old man's protection and marry his daughter for dowry (Selimović 1999: 62).

The totality of Šabo's moral condemnation of Džemal can be understood here as based in the contempt for the way in which Džemal compromises his healthy working-class masculinity by engaging in homosexual relations with an older rich man. Džemal subsequently becomes part of a closeted homosexual lobby and a bolt in the city's autocratic power mechanism. This sexual facet of the squinty intellectual thus solidifies him as the embodiment of the cowardly strategizing that Šabo, as we have seen in the previous section, equates with the corruption and corruptibility of power.

Consequently, the novel's homosocial universe splits into two distinct networks. One is a perverted hierarchy marked by strategizing and fear, corruption and excess, inauthenticity, and homosexuality, and is centrally represented by Džemal. The other is an ostensible camaraderie of men who lean on each other, while excluding every possibility of queer desires, and celebrating masculine normativity as a means to potentially usher in a better future.

The utopian potentialities of male camaraderie

Šabo's marriage to Tijana, a poor Christian woman and a proud daughter of a man executed for his political stances, is arguably the only novel's relationship described completely idealistically – at least from Šabo's perspective. The depiction of the marriage also displays many of the novel's overall characteristics, including autobiographical elements and anachronisms.[11] Šabo's feelings for Tijana are predominantly expressed through his tacky adoration and idealization of his wife, best exemplified by his infantilizing descriptions of Tijana.[12] Critical reception of *The Fortress* has oftentimes reproduced Šabo's idealisations and posited Tijana as the centre of Šabo's domestic sanctuary from the deprived outside world.[13] However, Aldijana Šišić's (1997) feminist reading purposefully introduced a distinction between 'Tijana as a real woman' and 'Šabo's vision of Tijana' in order to circumvent the novel's idealizations and focus on the ways in which Tijana remains subdued by the patriarchal social system:

> As a real woman, Tijana is an impoverished Christian woman married to an impoverished Muslim man. Responsive to the reality of their life and its difficulties, Tijana works and earns money to support her husband and herself. Even though she is the breadwinner, according to her traditional role, she continues to please her husband by making sure that their troubles do

[11] Critics have pointed out that Tijana's and Šabo's marriage potentially dramatizes certain events from Selimović's own marital life, for instance his hardships following his move to Belgrade after losing his job at the University of Sarajevo, but also Selimović being married to a Christian woman. At several instances in the novel, Šabo is explicitly marginalized because of his interfaith marriage, something that, as Robert Hodel (2011, 155) noted, connects him to the author himself. Furthermore, Wachtel (2010) demonstrated that Šabo's and Tijana's interfaith marriage is also quite anachronistic. Apart from being an uncommon practice in the time *The Fortress* takes place, when people of different religions did marry, the wife would usually convert to her husband's religion, which Tijana does not. On the other hand, interfaith marriage was quite common at the time the novel was written. In fact, it was a particular socialist-era Bosnian phenomenon, one that was 'not only common in Titoist Yugoslavia, but in fact supported by the state' as a strategy to undo national separatism (Jakiša 2009: 252).

[12] For instance: 'It was an eternal pity that I couldn't buy presents every day, all sorts of presents, just to see her eyes gleaming with delight like a child's' (Selimović 1999: 91) or 'Her eyes were moist with sleep, her lips swollen like those of a child' (Ibid., 199).

[13] Tijana has been seen as part and parcel of the novel's theme of 'fortress of familial love' (Prohić 1988: 72) and inextricably linked to the way in which *The Fortress* 'retouches the *Dervish's* [Selimović's preceding novel] bleak vision of the world through a lyrically elated story about love' (Kazaz 2004: 198).

> not trouble him. And all of that in order to save his "muško dostojanstvo [male dignity]". (Šišić 1997: 126)

Once disinvested from Šabo's idealisations, Šišić demonstrated, Tijana can be read as a hardworking and opinionated woman who, nonetheless, voices her dissatisfaction with her marital life only once. In one of the novel's most revealing and arguably most beautiful passages, Tijana reveals the thoroughly alienating and confining nature of her everyday existence. Far from being happy in what Šabo thinks of as their domestic haven, Tijana's thoughts and feelings are marred by suppressed anger and profound sadness caused by isolation. Importantly for my analysis, just before Šabo writes off her concerns as a pregnant woman's whim, Tijana voices a critical account of her husband's increasing dependence upon a camaraderie of fellow men:

> She'd given up everything that she was, forgotten her family, put aside everything to which she was accustomed, lost contact with friends and acquaintances, and all for my sake. I'd given up nothing. I could go out, I had my own friends, my own worries that were not hers, since I hid them. I was away all day; heaven alone knew where I was and what I was doing. I kept and observed all my customs. … Why hadn't she said anything? Did she have to say everything? Couldn't I see for myself? I cared about Mahmut, about Ramiz, about Shehaga, but I didn't care about her. (Ibid., 264-265)

Tijana's remark is critically important for my reading since it underlines the intimate and horizontal nature of Šabo's homosocial ties marked by his care for his male friends. This remark can also be seen as a nutshell version of the intricate processes of homosocial bonding that make Šabo increasingly reliant upon his fellow men and ultimately reframe his relationship with Tijana. These men are Mahmut Neretljak, Šabo's borderline kleptomaniac business partner, a benevolent con artist and jack-of-all-trades, specializing in often comedic attempts at earning money fast; Šehaga Sočo, an immensely rich local merchant and a bereaved father of a son executed for military desertion; and Osman Vuk, Šehaga's rugged, beautiful, and undyingly devoted foreman. Together, I argue, these characters spearhead the novel's politically utopian horizon by opposing the violent powerholders through the formation of a chain of solidarity or, in other words, a veritable camaraderie.

A crucial example of horizontal male homosociality is Šabo's relationship with Mahmut Neretljak. Once he overhears Mahmut

teaching a group of local children gibberish instead of Arabic, Šabo, who actually knows the language, offers his help to Mahmut for free. On the other hand, it is Mahmut who finds Šabo beaten up and soiled by Džemal's thugs after the reception, brings him home and helps Tijana wash and bandage him. Following his ostracism from the community, both Šabo and Tijana, despite her work, begin to rely increasingly on Mahmut's help. The novel's chain of mutual male solidarity continues in unexpected places, and oftentimes transforms previously established relationships. For instance, Osman Vuk, Šehaga's magnetic and volatile strongman, exhibits uncharacteristic softness after witnessing Mahmut being shamed for his odd jobs and threatened with extortion by his disrespectful son. Although at earlier instances Osman spoke of Mahmut as an unimportant fool, following this scene he immediately helps Mahmut out by offering him a steady job in Šehaga's grain warehouse.

Within this alternative network of male homosociality, or a circle of solidarity opposing the prism of the elite's hierarchy, the wealthy Šehaga Sočo functions as the ringleader. Because of his wealth, Šehaga is the only one out of the novel's cast of characters who can actively, although covertly, oppose and sabotage the political edifice of corruption. Šehaga's actions are driven by a vindictive rage over a family tragedy. His only son, lured into partaking in an armed conflict by war propaganda and peer pressure, ends up executed for desertion. This trauma turns Šehaga into a bitter man who flaunts and exaggerates his disdain for his country and its people, yet also exhibits a lot of heartfelt compassion and care for ex-soldiers.

While holding 'all the high-placed officials in his pocket by means of loans and bribes' (Ibid., 37), Šehaga also engages in what can only be described as para-institutional or pre-institutional (given the novel's historical setting) social welfare care. His efforts at undermining the local elite's grip on the populace are supplemented by his partly secret and unrecognized work with keeping those in need away from hunger and total despondency. Among others, Šehaga is revealed to have been helping out Muharem, the war veteran/beggar the sight of whom enraged Šabo as a symbol of everything wrong with the war veterans' destinies, just before the doomed reception dinner with the city's elite.

Apart from sustaining impoverished war veterans through loans, employment and donations, he also blows heavy strikes against the powerholders. For instance, in a secret mission,

operated by Osman Vuk, Šehaga sets free the dissident student Ramiz, the powerholders' main political enemy. He also has inspector Avdaga, the powerholders' main agent, killed, and plans to arrange for Džemal's downfall. This bold move, however, will claim Šehaga's head. During a trip to Venice, Šehaga falls ill and dies, presumably after being poisoned by Džemal. The very last journey of Šehaga Sočo in this context can be interpreted as his final gift to Šabo. As Šabo recounts the reasons Šehaga gave for taking him to Venice:

> Since a young man should see some of the world, since then he would not be on his own, and because he wanted to take me into his service. Should I now want to be taken into his service, even though it was high time I got myself a job, the journey would do me no harm. It would make it easier to face life in this misery. (Ibid., 371)

The impact of the voyage on Šabo thus further exemplifies the amalgamation of political utopianism and normative homosociality. Its aftermath, however, also signals a much darker way in which Šabo's gendered self gets transformed upon his return from Venice. On the one hand, much like the voyage's tragic end makes explicit the depths of Šehaga's love for his country and its people, it too makes Šabo realize his rootedness and infuses him with a healthy suspicion towards the fabled progress of Venice. On the other hand, it also reinvigorates Šabo's patriarchal grip over his wife. With Šabo's horizons broadening because of Šehaga's help, Tijana's are narrowing. She is left pregnant, confined to the domestic sphere more than ever, and solidified into an idealized beacon of comforting domesticity upon Šabo's return. Most importantly, she is transformed into an object of his increasing jealousy and possessiveness because, for some reason, he cannot shake off the baseless thought of Osman visiting her while he lay sea-sick upon the return from Venice.

Šehaga's death also seems to usher in a new sense of insecurity for the likes of Džemal who sniffs his yellowed corpse at the funeral to make sure he has really passed away (Ibid., 314). While remembering that, just before dying, Šehaga mentioned his enemies to Osman, Šabo realizes this could be an omen of a bloody vendetta to come:

> "He called you to make you swear to avenge him."
> "For goodness' sake, what do you mean avenge him? He called me to discuss business." He said this with an icy, spiked smile, ever on the watch, ever defensive: a closed fortress.

> I said this to him and he laughed. "Like everyone else. And thank God. Why should we remain defenseless? The enemy's all around us."
> Had Shehaga left him the task of vengeance? If he had, this apparent peace would soon be shattered. (Ibid., 398)

Šehaga's demise, therefore, signals the prospective resistance of those whom he sustained, both materially and spiritually, and anticipates their possible intervention into the world of vertical corruption, perverted hierarchies, futile wars, and stolen futures. The promise of the camaraderie's uprising is concomitant to Tijana's ever-growing isolation and the gathering clouds over Džemal Zafranija's head. This ambiguous new futurity is tentatively announced as the novel ends with Šabo watching fresh troupes of young men paraded to yet another war:

> No matter what their names, their fate was the same. No matter whether they were sad or falsely cheerful, they'd not return. My comrades hadn't returned. They perished to a man. And would my children tread the same miserable path when they grew up? Would they live as stupidly as their fathers did? In all probability they would, but I refused to believe it. I refused to believe, but I couldn't free myself from apprehension (Ibid., 400).

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Pearls of a Rare Hue: Partition Histories in Manto's *Necropolis*

Priyam Goswami Choudhury

Summary

The rhizomatic relationalities that one can build from an event form the fabric of experience in both historical terms and in terms of personal experience. Saadat Hasan Manto's partition stories deal primarily with narratives from the margins of experience in the immediate aftermath of the partition of India that use these relationalities as literary objects. My argument is that Manto builds a dialogue with the dead and the violence associated with it by using a very particular kind of narrative focalization that brings a nuanced relationship between the perpetrator and the violated female body. Furthermore, this paper will also show how Manto's narratives of the violated female body are posited upon using language as sites where the categories of "dead" and "living" merge to create a visceral narrative that critically locates the reader as a witness of history.

Keywords: Saadat Hasan Manto, Partition Literature, Postcolonial literature, nationalism, historical fiction

I came to accept this nightmarish reality without self-pity or despair. In the process, I tried to retrieve from this man-made sea of blood, pearls of a rare hue…
Saadat Hasan Manto

In introducing Saadat Hasan Manto's prose to readers in *My Name is Radha* published by Penguin India in 2016—the "Preamble", as Muhammed Umar Menon calls it—he recalls that 'it is not the business of fiction to write the history of a society, but it is very much its business to write the history of the individual" (Menon 2011: xiii). With what Daniyal Mueenuddin had called "horror moderated by his grim humour", Manto's literary object is never the individual himself, instead it is the absurdity of situations that creates the self who is located in a historical circumstance (Mueenuddin 2011: ix). In this essay, I propose to look at the relationship of the individual with the dead in two of Manto's short stories. My objective here would be to re-read Manto's prose in order to facilitate a reading of the dead and the self of the focalized character in the narrative as something that aptly captures the political tumult descended upon the Indian subcontinent in the immediate aftermath of the Partition in 1947, leading to mass-scale violence.[1] My primary focus in these readings would be to explore, through these two stories of Manto, the *topos* where the narrative meets the dead, in order to create an affective reading of the violence and death as it appears in the text as a representation of history. The affect, I would argue, brings the historical violence to a level that is so viscerally located in "history[ies] of the individual" (to borrow briefly from Menon's articulation) that the reader is left in the necropolis, where the tension between the characters and the dead remains unresolved. Both these stories also have a very liminal line between love and terror–which is where I would posit this taut tension that Manto build for us in the narratives.

For the sake of creating a context for this essay, let me begin with brief summaries of both the stories that I will be writing about in this essay:

> The first story is called "Thanda Gosht". When Menon translated it in 2016, it was retitled "Frozen". In 1997 Khalid Hussain had translated it as "Colder than Ice". I shall resort to the original title of the story ("Thanda Gosht") for one reason: Both "Frozen" and

[1]Daniyal Mueenuddin, who wrote the introduction to the 2011 collection translated by Khalid Hasan, wrote about his own father's lot who happened to be an official during the riots: "My father, who was a Rehabilitation Commissioner in Lahore at the time of Partition, had the gruesome task of meeting the trains that came into Lahore from Indian Punjab, freighted with a load of corpses, butchered en route by Hindu and Sikh mobs—just as some functionary on the opposite side had the task of meeting at Delhi's station death trains loaded with slaughtered Hindus and Sikhs." (Mueenuddin 2011: ix)

"Colder than Ice" do not take account of the word '*gosht*' in the original: the word in both Urdu and Persian for 'tender meat'. "Thanda Gosht", here, is of course dead tender meat of a human being.

The plot of the story can be summarized thus: One night, Ishwar Singh arrives late, and his wife Kalwant Kaur is miffed. When Kalwant Kaur asks him about his whereabouts, Ishwar Singh does not reply. She thinks that he has lied to her and asks him, quite playfully, if he had been 'back to the city'. In this context, it would not be incorrect to assume that it also refers to the rioting and the looting that was very common just after partition. He does not reply. He only shows amorous responses and tells her that she is a 'fine' woman and that there is no woman like her, that she was not a woman 'but a delicacy'. She goads him into admitting that something had happened eight days ago and that he was not the 'same man as he was'. To prove her wrong, he tries to make love to her and fails. Kalwant, convinced that she has lost her husband to someone else, asks him again, who was that woman, to which Ishwar Singh replies, 'no one'.[2] At the end, he does admit that there was a woman involved; to which the very infuriated Kalwant Kaur picks up his *kirpal* (traditional knife that Sikhs carry in their turban) and plunges it into his neck. When she asks the name of the woman from her dying husband it is here that we get to know, her husband replies:

'There was this house I broke into… there were seven people in there, six of them men whom I killed with my kirpal one by one… and there was one girl… she was so beautiful… I didn't kill her… I took her away.'
She sat on the edge of the bed, listening to him.
'Kalwantjani, I can't begin to tell you how beautiful she was… I could have slashed her throat, but I didn't… I said to myself… Ishrsian, you gorge yourself on Kalwant Kaur every day… how about a mouthful of this luscious fruit!'
'I thought that she had gone into a faint, so I carried her over my shoulder all the way to the canal which runs outside the city… then I laid her down on the grass, behind some bushes and… first I thought I would shuffle her a bit… but then I decided to trump her right way…'
'What happened?' She asked.
'I threw the trump…but, but…'
His voice sank.

[2] This answer that Ishwar Singh says that he was with "no one" is an interesting choice for an answer here for many reasons that I expand later in the paper.

> Kalwant Kaur shook him violently. 'What happened?'
> Ishwar Singh opened his eyes. 'She was dead… I had carried a dead body… a heap of cold flesh…jani give me your hand.'
> Kalwant Kaur placed her hand on his. It was colder than ice. (Manto 2011: 21)

The second short story I want to discuss in this paper is called "Khol Do". It is translated as "Open it!" in the Menon translation; the urgent imperative is the most accurate translation of the Urdu title as well. The story begins with an older man named Sirajuddin who has woken up in a train only to realise that her only daughter is missing. He gives a detailed description to a group of 'volunteers' who—on finding the daughter, named Sakina—may have raped her repeatedly, as it is indicated in the story. The story's climax comes to us when we are shown, seemingly, the corpse of Sakina. The doctor examines her and this is the ending:

> The doctor glanced at the body lying on the stretcher. He felt the pulse and pointing at the window, told Sirajuddin, 'Open it!'
> Sakina's body stirred ever so faintly on the stretcher. With the lifeless hands she slowly undid the knot of her waistband and lowered her shalwar.
> 'She's alive! My daughter is alive!' Old Sirajuddin screamed with unbounded joy.
> The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (Manto 2016: 218)

What interests me in both the stories is the overlapping narrative of love and terror: more accurately, I want to contrast the terror of the perpetrator in "Thanda Gosht" that overlaps with the terror of the witnessing doctor in the second story. What is the overlap? In the first story, Ishwar Singh, in realising that he had accidentally violated a dead body cannot seem to come to terms with his act. Let us go back to the story: when Kalwant Kaur asks her husband what it is that is bothering him, the only answer is 'no one'. Now, in hindsight of course, the no one is the 'pure absence'—I borrow from Derrida here—which is both the self of the girl who is 'no one' because she is dead and avoiding the question in the conversation. I would also argue that a rhizomatic reading of the text would also bring the aspect of terror that he experiences in this narrative. This, then, is not just the realisation that he had raped a dead girl that traumatises him, but also that—in coming into contact with the dead body of the raped girl—his space as demarcated, is as part of the victim as opposed to the body of the perpetrator whose principal binary is difference and

not similarity.[3] The violated body of the female, here, seems to be a portal into a kind of space which is not death (because, even as he is dying in the last line of the story, we are being told of this mysterious bond that connects the two now) and it is definitely not just described as an object of fantasy (for the perpetrator or the wife, who—like the reader of the narrative—is being told about the incident at the same moment) or even regret.[4] Ishwar Singh calls the violated body a heap of cold tender flesh (and not a "dead girl" or a "dead body" at that point of enunciation) and his moment of 'madness' of not being able to express himself, correctly, of course comes from the moment that is a complete misnomer. His speech, that could have signified his own location, is negated by the connection to the dead body that he says he "deserves" and denied by the violated dead body.[5] In our act of reading, the moment is also affected by this moment of non-location. This non-location, where Ishwar Singh the perpetrator is both the one who rapes a dead body and also interlocutor who is closest to the terror of the victim. Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference* writes:

> [t]o grasp the operation of the creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom… This experience of conversion, which founds the literary act (writing or reading), is such that the very words 'separation' and 'exile', which always designate the interiority of a "breaking-off" with the world and a making of one's way within it, cannot directly manifest the experience; they can only indicate it through a metaphor whose genealogy itself would deserve all of our efforts. For in question *here is a departure from the world toward a place which is neither a* non-place *universe nor another world, neither a utopia nor an alibi*…" (Derrida 1978: 7; emphasis mine)

This "experience of conversion", of course, is the moment where the perpetrator is entering the "*non-place*"—that is, the dead body of the girl. Ishwar Singh's experience brings him into the historical moment where he is unmoored, drifting between

[3] The rhizomatic, like the rhizome, "ceaselessly establishes connection between semiotic chains" and this precisely seems to describe the nature of the violated female body which functions as the rhizomatic space in this text (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7).

[4] Ishwar Singh's last words ('She was dead… I had carried a dead body… a heap of cold flesh…jani give me your hand.') connects the "heap of cold flesh" from being merely a description of the raped woman to an embodiment of his own dying process.

[5] As Kalwant, his wife, plunges a kirpal into his neck, Ishwar Singh says in the story: 'You acted impetuously […] but what you did I deserved.' (Manto 2011: 20).

the moment he chose to violate a woman and "slash her throat" after raping her and the moment where her dead body, in being violated, makes him come into visceral contact with the violent act itself. This particular location of the terror of coming into contact with the historical visceral violence is even more complicated should one consider the second story. This, however, requires one to engage in reading this story from the perspective of deictics and the way in which an imperative, spoken out loud in a space—the hospital, in this case—becomes this moment of overlap.

In the second story, the moment the doctor performs the speech act of an imperative, the reader, who believes at that point that Sakina could be dead, thinks that the imperative is directed towards someone else. However, when it comes to the imperative "Khol do!" or "Open it!", the person—someone in the scene who could open an window—who is being addressed does not even get to perform it. Instead, the narrative suddenly produces an origo—as Karl Bühler would call it in his 1990 text on the representational function of language—that refers directly to Sakina's trauma of being violated repeatedly and being asked to "open up". This is the more disturbing part of the speech act where Sakina is performing the act almost unconsciously at that moment of time. Now, the origo where that speech act would warrant that action is again circumvented to look at her father's reaction of happy relief as he realises that his daughter is, indeed, alive. The overlap here is that while a speech act ("Khol do!") conflates the doctor with the rapist who has violated her body, the doctor also becomes, albeit unwittingly, the witness of the trauma. That is, in unknowingly asking the father to open the window with the urgency of an imperative (hence, "Open it!"), he mimics the rapist who had shouted the same imperative at Sakina just before violating her body. And in showing the horror of the doctor in the last line of the short story, Manto is also locating the doctor in the historical space of partition, not unlike Ishwar Singh. The symbolic power of his speech act is a repetition of a position of power and the "experience of conversion", should one take up Derrida again, is one without an alibi.

The contact with 'death' (in case of "Thanda Gosht") or of 'death-like state' (for Sakina) in this case of the violated female body, however, produces an interesting relationship with politics and the violent history of the subcontinent since it becomes relevant to this negotiation of the political and yet literary object of a violated female body. For one, what does Manto's writing

of the violated female body do to the already problematic space of the female body in nationalist narratives of the Indian subcontinent? Perhaps this is also important to point out here that somewhere in the nineteenth century the idea of Bharat or India had become emblematic of a mother figure. It is of course Sumathi Ramaswamy's work that has produced very detailed scholarship on the "bodyscapes" that defines this relationship (something that I will go into shortly in the coming paragraphs). However, given the scope of my question, I want to focus my own reading of this "bodyscape" to the silence of the violated body. One has to add that the historical narrative of the partition is already one that is rife with the silences of victims and perpetrators alike. The question, as one can gauge quite well, is a pointedly political one. As Rada Iveković has remarked in her essay "Partition as a Form of Transition", where she studies the partition of the former Yugoslavia, India, and the violence in Rwanda, the notion of such violence, when it is read in connection with politics, always denotes "[w]hat is at stake in nation-building but also in the exercise of justice is how (and for whom) citizenship is conceived" (2006: 30). Given that British India was partitioned in 1947 and the violence was on both sides of the eastern and western borders of the former colony, it is only in understanding the contradictions—along with the silence that the violated and oppressed body of the female—that we can start to grasp at the mass mindless violence which is not only historical but also a moment that cannot be seen as only a rhizomatic space. The mindlessness of the violence is replicated by Manto not by means of descriptions of the violence; that is, we never arrive at scenes where the rapes had taken place. The space of articulation here is not documentary in nature. And yet, the moment of representation of that violence, once as a story that a dying man tells his wife ("Thanda Gosht") and once as an imperative that unwittingly performs trauma ("Khol Do!"), are both performing the history of violence where a character (Kalwant in "Thanda Gosht" and the doctor in "Khol Do!") is suddenly bearing witness to the individuated locations of this violence.

And how do we deal with the silence of the female characters here? There is an interesting line that Michel Foucault had written in the context of reading the "This is Not a Pipe" painting in 1963. He had written that Magritte's second pipe in his painting *Les Deux mystères* (1966), in being similar to the one floating above the canvas, "multiplies intentional ambiguities for us before our eyes"

(Foucault 1982: 15). This "traditional bond" of meaning, I would argue, has been "perverted" into making their silence a more powerful one. There is, as mentioned earlier, a traditional lineage from the 19th century where the body of the female has been imbued with a conflation of the body of the nation in India. Ramaswamy, in her essay "Maps and Mother Goddesses in Modern India" calls it the 'bodyscapes' where, historically, with this conflation, the female body (and I would argue with extension with its 'conquest' through violence), has always been looked upon as a comment upon the state of the Indian Union (Ramaswamy, 2001: 97). If anything, by describing the violence and the violated bodies in no way within ideological terms, the silence of Manto's female characters lends itself to not being co-opted by ideologues whose linguistic conflation of the nation-space with the female body leads to a larger perversion of the 'mother' image. For instance, and I am quoting from Ramaswamy here,

> Around 1905, as a young patriot, Munshi met the Hindu nationalist Aurobindo Ghosh (1872- 1950) and asked him, 'How can one become patriotic?' With a disarming smile, Aurobindo pointed at a wall map of India and said: 'Do you see this map? It is not a map, but the portrait of Bharat-mata [Mother India]: its cities and mountains, rivers and jungles form her physical body. All her children are her nerves, large and small. .... Concentrate on Bharat [India] as a living mother, worship her with the nine-fold bhakti [devotion] (Ramaswamy 2001: 97).

The danger, as one can see, is that in understanding the silence as anything more than a violent act one endangers the victim into becoming an emblem of the violated body which can always be used for dissemination of nation state's discourse. On the other hand, the silence of the violated body is a "pure absence"—of meaning or narratives—that could be incorporated into a nationalist myth. The violence of this magnitude could not be read as anything else but a visceral silence that permeates this collective memory in Manto's work. Mueenuddin has called this Manto's "artlessness" or his "effortlessness"; something that makes Manto the ideal location for obeying the "historical imperative" (Mueenuddin 2011: xi-xiii). This is the space that, being violated and yet silent, brings the reader to a space where there *is* a possibility of hope. The hope, of course, is through an inverted sense of empathy. The reader, in being party to the trauma of the shock of the violence, is not given the easy access to a "good" or "bad" corner. Ishwar

Singh, the rapist, in realising the absurdity of human nature (he comments upon it twice) actually cannot come to terms with his own violent act. The necropolis of Manto, inhabited by the violated who show their violation in acts of silence, brings us closer to the absurdity of violence and the moment of historical violence itself. It is Mohammad Asim Siddiqui who reminds us of this when he says in his essay "Saadat Hasan Manto's Poetics of Resistance" that

> [a]ll through his writings, Manto evinces a critical attitude to any kind of power which results in the subordination of an individual, a class or a nation. This concern is apparent from the very beginning to the end of his writing career, from 'Tamasha' to his Letters to Uncle Sam. His refusal to be coopted into the system and his active resistance to dominant ideologies of his time distinguish his life and his poetics. (Siddiqui 2012: 19)

Manto's female characters have a silence where the violation of the body as the object of literary representation cannot be conflated either with the revenge trope that dominated some of the partition stories—that makes readers consumers of the pornography of violence—or the nationalist trope—something that has become more and more propagated over time in the subcontinent, with both India and Pakistan now being nuclear powers.

This, of course, now bridges our second question with which I would like to close my argument: What is the historical space that these narratives of violated bodies inhabit? And, indeed, how do they (or, we as readers with our own postcolonial lineage) inhabit them? I would argue that the silence of the violated bodies is very much an important part of this formulation of history. Let me point out here that with history, of course, we are concerned of these women who were part of oppressed social groups. This is history as it is remembered. Every day, in the state of India itself, women are both the body and the carrier of values and the social formation and yet, at the same time, the violated body of the female is not seen as a causal connection that forms nationalism (or nationalisms, should that term be formulated) and the violence of it. In *Theses on Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin comments that there are "causal connections between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is historical. It becomes historical posthumously" (Benjamin 1968: 263). The crystallization of a single moment of violence that is seen as historical itself can be lent to the co-option of an ideology. This is the 'conformism' that Benjamin's formulation of understanding history is trying to

avoid. The historical present has to be understood in the 'presence of the now'. The German term that Benjamin gives us for this is "*Jetztzeit*" or "Now-Time" (Ibid., 261).

The violated silent body of the female which is given to us with only description (Sakina's mole on her face, the heap of cold flesh), the very visceral reality of it, is what keeps us in suspension in this *jetztzeit*. The fiction, through its very cold and measured prose, gives the reader a suspension and never tries to usurp its own space, as though it were a historical document. To reiterate the opening preface of his introduction, it is not the business of fiction to become a historical 'document' but with Manto, we get the 'documenting' of the historical—I am interested in the verb form here—that becomes a process of history that is trying to create a space where Ishwar Singh's body is *becoming* colder than ice, or the doctor is *breaking* into a cold sweat just as the reader is coming to terms with the historical violence being narrated. The reader, with Ishwar Singh and with the doctor, is left in suspension, in the *jetztzeit*. The only way to negotiate the narrative at that point of time, of course, is also to negotiate with the moment of historical violence. And in Manto's universe, that temporality is not a monolith but one that is filled with contradictions: one can see it in the contradiction between the marital love of Ishwar Singh and Kalwant Kaur as opposed to the historical crime of Ishwar Singh; the contradiction between the love for the daughter that Sirajuddin shows while, at the very same moment, being a witness to a moment of trauma that is completely historical in its victimization of women during Partition. This is the entanglement between love and terror where reader is left in suspension; the reader, in other words, is still in Manto's necropolis just as the man-made sea of blood overflows into the landscape of history itself.

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Historical World Novel and Its Heroines

Jasmina Lukić

Summary

In this article I am exploring the possibility to read the genre of world novel, as defined by Debjani Ganguly, from a historical perspective. Going back to Linda Hutcheon's interpretation of historiographic metafiction as a postmodern genre, I will investigate what happens if history is approached from a gendered perspective in a post-colonial and decolonial context. Reading *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith as examples of world novel, I want to claim that there is a similar interest to return to history as we can see in historiographic metafiction. At the same time, there is also an important difference between the two genres. Historiographic metafiction is characterised by its paradoxical approach to history, and its return to the past at the same time puts in question that very move. The world novel on the other hand questions the history as we know it by re-narrating it from the point of view of those who did not get the voice at the time and were erased from history.

Keywords: world novel, history, feminism, *The Blind Assassin*, *White Teeth*

Looking at the contemporary novel as a 'global form', Debjani Ganguly postulates the existence of a new novelistic genre, which she names *world novel*. For her, the 'contemporary world novel' is a 'distinctive literary formation'. Locating it temporally around the historically significant threshold of 1989, she relates its emergence to the conjuncture of three critical phenomena: the geopolitics of

war and violence since the end of the cold war; hyperconnectivity through advances in information technology; and the emergence of a new humanitarian sensibility in a context where suffering has a presence in everyday life through the immediacy of digital images (Ganguly 2016: 1). Later in this article, I am going to argue that this list of critical phenomena that shape the world novel needs to be extended by another one, which is the rise and influence of the emancipatory movements of marginalised social groups.

World Novel as a Global Form

As a product of the age of informational capitalism, world novel is capable to 'imagine human condition on a scale larger than ever before in history and certainly beyond national and regional configurations' (*Ibidem*). According to her, the world novel has a new chronotope, the world. Therefore, among the main questions Ganguly tackles in her study are how the world is conceptualised through the genre of novel, and what the novel can tell us about our being in the world (Ibid., 24). In answering these questions, she underlines how her approach differs from that taken by Edward Said, for whom, as she puts it, the world was 'primarily the material domain of economic and political interest'. For Ganguly, on the other hand, there is an emphasis on the difference between the worlds of fiction and the actual world we live in, where the world is 'related to, but not synonymous with its material and chronotopical coordinates'. In this respect, Ganguly accepts the main postulates of literary formalisms, and most notably the possible world theories as they have been influential in literary studies via Thomas Pavel and Ruth Ronen, for example. Thus, the 'world' is seen here 'as a linguistically finite set of entities and relations marked off by worlds made up of other finite set of entities and relations', the novel is understood as 'a world-enclosing total system', and the actual world is 'but one of the conditions of possibility for creation of the fictional world and not the sole determinant of its *realism*'(Ibid., 21-22). The position Ganguly takes here enables her to investigate the ways in which the contemporary novel engages with the actual world but without reducing the novel to a mere 'reflection' of experiential reality. In other words, fictional worlds are seen here as non-mimetic; at the same time, they are involved with the reality of what we know as our world, and the world novel as a genre is defined through this involvement as one of its important characteristics. This means that the world novel functions as socially responsible art form

even though Ganguly recognises the 'ontological sovereignty of fictional worlds' (Doležel 1998: 21).

There are different answers to the question how these ontologically sovereign worlds may engage with our world. One possible answer might be found in the quality of accessibility as a prerequisite for existence of literary possible worlds; if we cannot access possible worlds of literature, they cannot exist for us, hence they always have to include some level of references to our shared encyclopaedias of knowledge (Eco 1983; Doležel 1988). The other, which is more relevant for my interpretation, is that possible worlds of fiction postulate complex (fictional) realities that correspond to our experiential reality, and through these correspondences offer an invitation to engage with the complexities of our own experiences. By saying this, I am evoking Ato Quayson's method which is 'a form of close reading of literature with what lies beyond it as a way of understanding structures of transformation, process, and contradiction that inform both literature and society' (Quayson 2003: xi). It is a reading practice that Quayson calls *calibrations*, referring to 'that situated procedure of attempting to wrest something from the aesthetic domain for the analysis and better understanding of the social'(Ibid., xv). Thus the usual order is changed, for Quayson is using literature to read the social; 'the social and its cognate, society' is understood here as 'analytically bounded fields in the eye of the literary critic' (Ibid., xxix), where social is "always an object produced out of an interrogation and thus has to be *read for*" (Ibid., xxxi).

Similar is the position of Pheng Cheah, who 'seeks to understand the normative force that literature can exert in the world, the ethicopolitical horizon it opens up for the existing world' (Cheah 2016: 5). Understanding normativity as 'what ought to be', Cheah considers that literature has the power to 'change the world according to a normative ethicopolitical horizon' (Ibid., 6). And while Ganguly defined world novel through its engagement with the world we live in, for Cheah such an engagement is the main characteristic of world literature; for him, 'such a literature is also a real and ongoing process *of* the world, the principal of change immanent to the world' (Ibid., 210). He understands world literature through its 'connections to worlding and the coming of time', which points to 'imminent resources for resisting capitalist globalization'(Ibid., 11), emphasising that 'the persistence of time is infrastructural to capital and cannot be destroyed' (*Ibidem*). But

it is a concept of time the world literature can critically interrogate through its capacity for worlding, which is in itself a temporal category. 'The theory of world literature I propose suggests that the world is a normative temporal category and not the spatial whole made by globalization' (Ibid., 16). Cheah does not turn to possible worlds theories as Ganguly does, but he nevertheless speaks of 'worlds' created in literature. World literature 'has the normative vocation of opening new worlds', and it has a capacity to do it 'even in the most devastating scenarios,' while looking at the world-destroying consequences of capitalist globalisation (*Ibidem*).

Worlding processes are temporal, and one of the ways in which literature can perform its role to produce change is to engage with the question of time. While the time of capitalist globalisation is perceived as linear, through narrative fiction various other modes of heterotemporality may be examined. Cheah considers that postcolonial literature in particular possesses the power to be critical in that sense, which turns it into 'world literature by virtue of its participation in worlding processes'(Ibid., 213). The examples of postcolonial fiction that Cheah analyses in his book 'provide cognitive mappings of the position of the societies they portrait in the global capitalist system and attempt to stage the heterotemporality of alternative modernities.' Yet, Cheah does not consider all forms of heterotemporality equally productive. Heterotemporalities created by nationalist bourgeoisies promoting alternative modernities do not really manage to produce the critical potential that Cheah argues for (Ibid., 201-202). This potential is located elsewhere:

> "below" the bourgeois nation's alternative modernity are other marginalized alternative modernities and political communities that cannot be represented through the nation-state because they appear to be antimodern within the discourse of modernization -the untouchables, women, peasants, and so on (Ibid., 202).

I am underlining this point in Cheah's approach in order to support my claim that, as mentioned earlier, Ganguly's list of three critical phenomena that shape the appearance of the world novel as a global form need to be extended by another one, and that is the rise and influence of the emancipatory movements of marginalised social groups. This claim also implicitly emphasises the significance of 1989, where Ganguly sets the time-horizon for the appearance of the world novel. For her, 1989 is not primarily

linked with the 'postcommunist historical horizon' (Ganguly 2016: 6), rather it is an indicator of a more complex set of events; in her perception it isa 'critical threshold of the "contemporary" that contains within its intensified temporality developments from the 1960s to the present' (*Ibidem*). Thus, argues Ganguly, the larger historical scenes that shapes the world novel are 'the cracks' in the liberal consensus that 'began to be visible in the spring of 1968 and grew exponentially until 1989', to be further fractured after that by 'the excesses of a neoliberal world order' (ibid., 7).The genre of the world novel then 'comes to the stage to offer a critical perspective on these events'(Ibid., 6-7).Those are works that 'express a new kind of humanitarian ethics, a new internationalism built on a shared dread of human capacity for evil coupled with a deep awareness of the ambiguities of sharing grief across large expanses of ravaged death worlds' (Ibid., 10). If the period from the 1960s on is interpreted in such a way, the significance of the new emancipatory social movements including second wave feminism, cannot be overstated.

Time in World Novel

In this paper I am interested in the ways in which changes in gender regimes globally and locally have been affecting the ways in which world literature exemplifies the process of worlding in Cheah's sense of the term (Cheah 2016: 211), or the way world is conceptualised through the genre of novel, as Ganguly understands it. Yet, the angle from which I want to consider this question here concerns possible approaches to history. Cheah's and Ganguly's interest is primarily turned towards present times and to futurity. Although time is the central category in his analyses of worlding processes, Cheah points to the question 'how presence can generate something within itself that brings the continuity of time apart and brings about the pluralization of temporalities' (Ibid., 208), an aporia related to heterotemporality. The novels he is analysing in his study 'locate the opening of heterotemporality in the persistent presence of precolonial, non-European traditions that exert of powerful hold on the consciousness of key characters. The novels thus critically revive non-Western concepts of the world for progressive use in the present and future' (Ibid., 214).

The same focus on the present and, consequently, on the future as an outcome of present activities can be found in Walter Mignolo's explanation of decoloniality, which I am evoking here

to underline the similarity between Mignolo and Cheah in this respect. Thus Mignolo says:

> The future doesn't exist, and neither does the past. We all, on the planet, live in a constant and always fluctuating present carrying the burden of the past and the hopes for the future. The future would be what we human beings are doing in the present for over the planet (…). Decoloniality is one among other options in the present (Mignolo and Walsh 2018: 115).

And later on:

> Decoloniality is undoing and redoing; it is praxis." (Ibid., 120). Following Quijano, calls for "epistemic reconstitution" (Ibid., 120), since "decoloniality is first and foremost liberation of knowledge (…), of understanding and affirming subjectivities that have been devalued by narratives of modernity that are constructive of the colonial metrics of power (Ibid., 146).

For Mignolo, criticism of patriarchy and of patriarchal masculine conception has an important role in decolonising practices (Ibid., 126-127). With these assumptions in mind and placing both Ganguly's reading of world novel and Cheah's reading of 'new world literature' in the larger context of decoloniality as a 'liberation of knowledge', I propose here to read two examples of women's fiction that turn their focus on the past.

My aim is twofold here. On the one hand, I want to see if and how the treatment of gender regimes in these texts contributes to my reading them as 'world novels' and/or belonging to 'new world literature'. On the other hand, I question whether this gendered framework offers a different reading of history, a reading that prioritises previously marginalised or silenced voices. Last but not least, I wonder if the paradox which, according to Linda Hutcheon, characterises historiographic metafiction and its treatment of history[1] is replaced here with a hope for new historical knowledge which decentralises existing historical narratives.

In order to do that I will focus here on *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith and *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood. Both novels

[1] 'The postmodern, then, effects two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. This is another of the paradoxes that characterizes all postmodern discourses today' (Hutcheon 1988: 89).

appeared in 2000, at the very beginning of the new millennia, and both are deeply concerned with history. The question I want to raise here is if we can speak of them as 'historical world novels', and how this interpretation relates to basic postulates of historiographic metafiction. As Hutcheon formulates it, historiographic metafiction 'puts in question, at same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real' (Hutcheon 1988: 92). My assumption is that historical world novel testifies to a similar (re)quest to go back to history, but with a wish to re-narrate it from the point of view of those who had no voice at the time. In other words, my working assumption is that historical world novel gives voice to those silenced by history.

Before focusing on Atwood and Smith, let me give two other indicative examples here. Giving voice to the silenced actors in history is exactly the move that Maryse Condé makes in her novel *I, Tituba, The Black Witch from Harlem* (1994), when she writes a fictional autobiography of a black slave accused in the Salem witches' trials (1692-93). Condé was initially inspired to write the book because all other protagonists of the trial were recorded in history, apart from a black woman, and all that was recorded about her was that after serving in prison for two years she was sold again into slavery for the 'price of her shekels.'

I am mentioning *Tituba* here to support the connection between fictional elements and the search for historical truth. It is only through constructing a fictional character that Condé can approach the real woman who lived more than three hundred years ago, and she does that with a conviction that such a move can help us understand better the hidden gendered and racialised histories. In this sense, the novel offers fictional re-living of history in order to shed a light on its erased pages. But also, to call for an epistemic shift which is again in its essence very close to decolonial logic: the novel affirms alternative knowledges of black slaves and indigenous people and reaffirms them through Tituba's healing practices. Jamaica Kincaid does the same in *Autobiography of My Mother* (1997) when she gives her heroine a knowledge of herbs which she has inherited from her ancestors. This knowledge is simply present as part of her cultural inheritance, and as such opposed to completely useless formal education she is exposed to.

The Blind Assassin as a Historical World Novel

The Blind Assassin is narrated by a character who is marginalised in a number of ways. She is a very old woman whose life spans almost the whole of the 20th century, a social outcast, divorced and deprived of her rights including her right to motherhood. Although it focuses on a very personal story, the novel also reads as an alternative history of Canada, or rather, of Canadian capitalism and the choices that were made in the name of (financial) prosperity at the cost of human dignity and voices of those without (financial) power. *The Blind Assassin* focuses on family as the basic unit of society supposed to secure its stability and growth. Instead, the family of the conservative bourgeois capitalism of the first half of the 20th century turns out to be the place of repressive patriarchy and excessive control over women. Taking as one of its central themes an arranged marriage motivated by financial reasons, the novel shows that such a family can also be an institution for trading in women's bodies; it treats women as a function of their husbands and not persons in themselves, allowing for them to be deprived of their basic human rights, and to lose control over their bodies, their parenthood rights and their livelihood.

It is not by chance that the novel's narrator is introduced indirectly, as Mrs. Richard Griffen, that is, her name completely erased by her husband's name; only later her real name Iris Chase will be revealed. The practice to call women by the name of their husbands is used here as a powerful indicator of the position that Iris has in her family as well as in society. The narrator will have to go through painful processes to fully repossess her birth name, Iris Chase, and to connect it to all that really makesher identity: to re-claim her motherhood and the authorship of her writings.

There are three types of texts, or rather three dominant genres that form the structure of the novel. The first, overarching text which allegedly includes the other ones is the autobiography of the narrator, i.e. the narrative told by the main character in first person singular. Her personal story is also the history of her family throughout the 20th century, which includes four generation of women, from the narrator's mother to her granddaughter. In the novel, the story that Iris Chase is telling us is aimed at one particular reader, the narrator's granddaughter, Sabrina. Before her death, Iris Chase wants to tell her granddaughter the true story of her family and thus of Sabrina herself, a history which

was hidden from her, and which contradicts official records and their accepted interpretations.

The second major text is a novel within the novel, also entitled *The Blind Assassin*, which in the world of the novel has been published as a book ascribed to Iris's sister Laura, although its real author was Iris. This novel within the novel produces one more 'turn of the screw', another juxtaposition of official and hidden histories. Iris published her novel under her deceased sister's name in order to be able to publish it at all; the novel challenges the established moral codes of conservative patriarchal society, and only a dead woman is outside its control. There is also an element of revenge in its publication, an attempt to unmask the duplicity of bourgeois society which calls for sexual purity while raped women are secretly forced to have abortions in secluded clinics in order to preserve the public image of wealthy and powerful perpetrators (which is what happened to Iris's sister, Laura). But the revealing effects of the novel remained limited partly because it was read as fiction, and partly because the assumed perpetrators were beyond reach.

The text of Iris's novel is an interesting generic combination of *écriture féminine* and science fiction, where its *écriture féminine* parts are engaging with the historically repressed topic of female sexuality and pleasure, while the science fiction part offers a dystopian story of exploitation and sacrifice narrated in the face of actual social repression. The segment within this narrative on how girls are to be sacrificed to gods by having their tongues cut off first so they wouldn't scream when they see the knife that is to kill them, represents a powerful parallel to the position of the narrator and the ways she has been silenced throughout her lifetime. The *écriture féminine* aspect of the novel also serves as a tool for liberation from this imposed silence (and I mean here as a fulfilment of Cixous's famous words 'women, write'). Additionally, with its involvements with *écriture féminine*, *The Blind Assassin* as the novel within the novel enters a productive dialogue with the main body of the text, which also belongs to a genre strongly marked by feminist interventions: autobiography. Thus, the thematic lines of the novel's involvement with women's history are narratively strengthened through the generic conventions that are used.

Finally, there is one more kind of text, the pseudo-documentary newspaper clips, which offer a glimpse into the immediate social and, to an extent, historical context of the events described in the

main narrative. The presence of these clips complicates the narrative structure of Atwood's book, and underlines the critical involvement of the novel with official historiography. Being presented as actual documents of the time, these clips have a double effect: they legitimise the historical accuracy of the text at the same time they do so with a great deal of irony, since most of them are from gossip columns. They offer a parallel historical record of the events (their dates of publication are duly stated); they also articulate public opinion about the protagonists of the novel as well as the norms upon which those opinions are based; finally, they indicate a larger historical context of the events not only by situating them on a time-scale, but also commenting some of the protagonists' public actions (particularly in the case of the family patriarch, Iris's husband Richard Griffen, who is obviously inclined to support fascism and expresses his good opinion on both Mussolini and Hitler).

If we read *The Blind Assassin* as a historical novel, the fact that the narrator's lover Alex Thomas is the real father of her only daughter Aimee reads as a form of rejection of the legacy represented by her husband Richard Griffen. But at the time of Iris's death in 1999, this rejection is yet to be acknowledged by her granddaughter Sabrina. Although marginal, and only in announcement at the end of the novel in the last clip, Sabrina is actually the pledge for the future that Iris puts her trust into. And the manuscript Iris leaves for her granddaughter aims to make her free:

> When I began this account of Laura's life - of my own life - I had no idea why I was writing it, or who I expected might read it once I'd done.But it's clear to me now.I was writing it for you, dearest Sabina, because you're the one - the only one – who needs it now.
> Since Laura is no longer who you thought she was, you're no longer who you think you are, either. That can be the shock, but they can also be the relief. For instance, you're no relation at all to Winifred, and none to Richard. There's not a speck of Griffen in you at all:your hands are clean to that score. Your real grandfather was Alex Thomas, and as to who his own father was, well, the sky's the limit. Rich man, poor man, beggarman, saint, a score of countries or origin, a dozen cancelled maps, at hundred levelled villages – take your peak. Your legacy from him is the realm of infinite speculation. You are free to reinvent yourself at will (Atwood 2000: 513).

This freedom is the freedom from the official history, which includes both national history and his/story. The liberation Iris wants to offer to her granddaughter is a much needed one,

which is illustrated through the character of Iris's daughter and Sabrina's mother Aimee. Aimee was given only the official history of her family/community, but it was not enough to offer her a safe grounding. Her family (communal) hidden history haunted her as a long-lasting source of trauma, making her unable to find her place. Lost in failed attempts to run away from the legacy she does not want and the ghosts she was not even aware of, Aimee loses the capability to acquire subjectivity and agency, and to do what she really wanted: to protect her daughter Sabrina. Sabrina attempts to liberate herself in another way, through humanitarian work, which is an attitude to the world very different from the one represented by her official family and its history.

It is also noteworthy that Sabrina's biological father, Alex Thomas comes from 'somewhere in Europe, but not from France or Germany'; probably 'more East'. He has no roots to define him, only ideals open to futurity to guide him. Putting him in the place of Richard as the real ancestor of those who are going to come and overtake the present, Margaret Atwood makes a profoundly political move. It is a renouncement of the logic of profit in the name of logic of solidarity and care. This is also the level at which *The Blind Assassin* reads as a feminist historical world novel.

Worlding Projects in *White Teeth*

Similarly to *The Blind Assassin*, *White Teeth* also does not immediately appear to be a historical novel, and yet, I will propose to read it as well in such a perspective. Here the voice is given to the so called 'ordinary people' who are simply erased from history. In the novel these 'small people' are two families strongly marked by their class and race, and the text introduces gender into that equation in a particular way.

The narrative frame of the novel is set very widely covering the second half of the twentieth century, bringing together several coexisting grand narratives that are framing social life in those times: colonialism, religion, secularism, and the cult of scientific objectivity. As it was the case with *The Blind Assassin*, this is also a family saga, starting at first as a story of two families, an interracial family of Archibald and Clara Jones, and a Muslim family of Samad and Alsana Iqbal, both originating from Bangladesh; later the novel widens its scope to introduce also a white middle-class family of Joyce and Marcus Calfen. While the characters of the Joneses and Iqbals allow Zadie Smith to address the complex interactions of class, race and gender in nowadays Britain, the

Calfens are introduced in the last part of the novel to make a connection between the fascist legacies of WWII and science devoid of ethical perspective. The two main male characters, Archibald Jones and Samad Iqbal, are both protagonists and victims of the official narrative of the national history of Great Britain. They have participated as solders in WWII becoming friends for life, both to experience later the marginalisation based on class and race differences. Their personal histories are hidden, untold histories of ordinary people who fight the wars and make the fabric of social life, remaining invisible and unrecognised.

At the same time there is another level of erasure uncovered in the novel, a gendered one. While men like Archibald and Samad are oppressed in their everyday social life and erased from official history, their wives, already excluded from the public sphere, are expected to remain invisible and voiceless in the private sphere as well.

At the beginning, it seems that Archibald and Samad are the main heroes of the novel, but it is Clara and Alsana who gradually take over and prove to be the real agents of history. Both Archibald and Samad are ironized from the very beginning of the novel through their inability to find proper answers to their life problems. It is obvious already in the first scene of *White Teeth*, in which Archibald Jones unsuccessfully attempts to kill himself. This scene is indicative for characterisation of Archie Jones, but also for the way irony operates in the novel. Namely, Archie wants to kill himself when his wife divorces him after thirty years of marriage, not because he loved her, but because he *did not* love her; it is the humiliation of being denied even the persistence in being unhappy that is taken away from him. Archie is not a man who takes much action, so he makes most of his decisions by tossing a coin. Thus, the coin has decided that he should kill himself, as well as the chance has decided that he would not die but marry a thirty-years younger woman and start a new life instead.

The life of his best friend Samad Miah is equally dependent on a chance as if he were also tossing a coin all the time, although he likes to think of himself as a man who makes his own decisions. Educated in classical philosophy, he works as a waiter in a bar where he is despised as the oldest and slowest one who brings the smallest tip. His decisions by the rule produce very different results from those he is expecting, and the best example for that is the result of his experiment with the upbringing of his twins, Millat and Magid. Burning with desire to being them up in real Muslim spirit, he wants to send them 'back home' to Bangladesh (a wish which strongly

problematizes the concept of 'home' since the twins are born in London). Since his wife opposes fiercely such an idea, he finally sends to Bangladesh only one of his sons, practically kidnapping him from the family.

The outcome of this decision is completely unexpected for Samad: Magid, who goes to Bangladesh to become a good Moslem, comes back as an ironic replica of Tagore, in a white suit and with a white hat; he has practically lost his faith there, and the culture he gets introduced to is a British colonial culture. On the other hand, Millat, who remained in London, gets radicalised in his Islamism, joins a Moslem fundamentalist brotherhood based in London, but also becomes a womanizer, thus twisting Samad's idea of a good Moslem in more than one way.

But the person who reacts to this situation is not Samad, but his wife Alsana. Thus, when Millat gets involved in burning of Salman Rushdie's book, she takes all Millat's things into the garden and puts them on fire as well with an obvious message that Millath as to experience himself what he is doing to the others.

Alsana thus steps forward as the carrier of ethical and moral principles that are promoted throughout the novel, but in a way which leaves to the reader to recognise their significance. Zadie Smith uses the same strategy when it comes to feminism. *White Teeth* is not an obviously feminist novel, leaving female characters as bearers of feminist ethics of care and solidarity seemingly in the 'back row'. But the way different narrative lines are developed and resolved keeps on pointing to their importance. Legacies of the second wave feminism and of the rising feminist consciousness practices saturate the novel. Clara Jones' return to school, and her attempts to achieve college-level education have not been introduced or represented with any rational or practical reasons like her wish to get a better job or more money for the family, but rather through references to her feminist courses. If we keep in mind Clara's distancing from the strong religious upbringing she was given, her choice of courses is more than an indicative, symbolic move which underlines her efforts to become another Clara, a person with radically different views. Moreover, in a novel where irony is so thoroughly present at all levels, it is significant that Clara's feminism has not been ironized. Alsana's survival strategies are not directly related with feminism, but they underscore the importance of women's strength and agency.

While their husbands mainly hide away in their favourite pub, Clara and Alsana know that their life strategies are also survival

strategies. One of the scenes in which this isquite obvious is the first meeting of Alsana and Joyce Calfen, a meeting that Alsana wants to avoid, but Joyce determinedly asks for, standing in front of Iqbals' door and ringing persistently.

"Mrs Iqbal? It's Joyce Calfen. Mrs Iqbal? It's Joyce. I can see you quite clearly. I really think we should talk. Could you… umm… open the door?"

Yes, she could. Theoretically, she could. But in this atmosphere of extremity, with warring sons and disparate factions, Alsana needed a tactic of her own. She's done silence, and word-strikes, and food consumption (the opposite of hunger-strike; one gets bigger in order to intimidate the enemy), and now she was attempting a sit-down protest (Smith 2000: 432).

Alsana's strategies of empowerment are her personal answer to the challenges of life she has not chosen for herself – as we get to know from a Samad's remark, her marriage with him was agreed upon long before she was even born – but she does not allow to be led through it as a passive non-subject, or as Samad was expecting, an 'obedient wife'. In that sense, however seemingly different, positions of Clara and Alsana are quite comparable: both of them were expected to listen and obey, and both of them have refused such a role. Alsana took power within a marriage that was arranged for her, and Clara took power stepping out of a symbolic marriage with Jehovah's Witnesses that, together with her mother as their member, attempted to take complete control over her life.

Such gestures are not to be underestimated regardless of the highly ironic context in which they occur. It is a form of taking agency without big gestures, and in that process two women become close not because they have to, since their husbands are best friends and they are necessarily oriented towards each other, but because they recognise a similarity and closeness early in their new lives as married women. The moment of recognition occurs before they meet in the official roles of wives at the first family dinner of Iqbals and Joneses. Before that Clara and Alsana meet by chance when Alsana goes for a walk, that is to pick up her husband's shoes after a fight she had with him, while Clara stands aimlessly on her porch, thinking how it happened that she has found herself there (Ibid., 62-64).The first moment of mutual recognition comes with a shared understanding of their similar position in their respective marriages: they understood that their husbands share more information between them as friends then

they do with their wives. In response to that discovery, Alsana will try to acquire more of a physical presence through her bigger body, using even physical force to give more weight to her claims. Clara, on the other hand, reaches out for additional support, going to college and taking women's studies courses.

Alsana and Clara are not revolutionaries. They make a change on day to day basis, subverting established oppressive practices within the scope of their private lives. It is given to their children to try to do more. While they start facing discrimination, being asked during the school community assignments where did they come from (all of them born Londoners), they end up being engaged in a scientific project as their hope for the future. This is also a point in which Zadie Smith turns to speculative fiction in order to address problems of history. Namely, the project that brings in one way or another all the children of the three families – the Joneses, the Iqbals and the Calfens – belongs to science fiction rather than to a historical novel. And yet, it is a tool which brings the WWII into the present, since the person behind the revolutionary project of 'Future Mouse', which aims to acquire genetic control over living organisms, is one of the main proponents of fascist ideology, a doctor who experimented on patients in the WWII. In a commotion which is created when Dr. Sick is recognised, Archie finally decides to act, and the 'Future Mouse' manages to escape his cage.

Thus, we get two closures for the novel. The first is a dystopic one, since the escape of the mouse indicates impossibility to control science and the ways it is going to develop. But there is also another closure, a gendered one, which I am also reading as an example of alternative, agentive happy ending. It is a short scene towards the very end of the novel, projected sometimes in the future, in which Irie's destiny is announced:

And is it young professional women aged eighteen to thirty-two who would like a snapshot seven years hence of Irie, Joshua and Hortense sitting by a Caribbean sea (for Irie and Joshua become lovers in the end; you can only avoid your fate for so long), while Irie's fatherless little girl writes affectionate postcards to *Bad Uncle Millat* and *Good Uncle Magid* and feels free as Pinocchio, a puppet clipped of paternal strings?

This is not a traditional happy ending, but it is an agentive closure since it resolves the destinies of the second generation in a way which gives all power to Irie, who does not need to resolve the question of biological fatherhood of her daughter, but puts both potential fathers, Magid and Millat, into a distant and yet

reachable position of 'Uncles', and takes Joshua as her lover. The picture brings together a chosen and not a biological family in a way that re-structures a traditional happy ending: it is not Irie who has to be happily integrated into the given social order, but it is Irie's model of family and life that is promoted here.

There is, of course, an ironic tone as well but it does not go against Irie. It is actually directed towards readers. Invoking a certain kind of audience – professional women of a certain age – Zadie Smith invokes here numerous debates on the role of genre and the role of the reader. She shows awareness that readers have specific expectations, but I also believe that behind this paragraph is also a reference to huge popularity of trivial romances among feminist literary critics. Thus Janice Radway (1984) emphasised the expectations of romance readers, by the rule women, and their almost imperative wish to have the novel resolved in a form of happy ending. Zadie Smith refers to women, but to professional women, and offers them a happy ending of a different kind. In the quoted scene Irie seems to be quite happy, but not because Joshua is there; the happiness comes much more from the whole situation in which she is at the Caribbean Sea (not a tourist resort for her, but an act of bringing together her different cultural legacies), her daughter is safely with her, and Joshua is there as well, but much more like a part of the picture, and not the centre of her world, as the traditional romantic happy ending would frame it.

The following scene, also projected in the future, also fits the proposed frame of interpretation. There we find Alsana and Clara joining Samad and Archie in their male sanctuary, Abdul-Mickey's pub (open for women since 1999), where they play blackjack together. It is not a radical move, but a small and yet significant change in their lives which once again recognised the power of two women to re-negotiate the rules of the male-dominated world, never fully changing it, but making it a more comfortable place to live in. It is not radical feminism that we read in the novel, but a strong feminist message that women have to work for themselves whatever the conditions are and whatever the form of agency they want to take is.

This is also a level at which I consider *White Teeth* to be a relevant example of historical world novel which brings forward a new type of heroines, women who take over the various legacies of feminisms and develop various strategies of defying oppression. They might be visible and recognisable in this fight, but they may also be very much withdrawn, getting strength from small-scale

achievements which keep them in control of their lives. If *The Blind Assassin* brings forward a hidden gendered history of the first half of the 20th century, *White Teeth* unpacks the second half presenting it as a huge, open-ended space of encounters and conversion between different traditions, cultures and ideologies. In the case of *The Blind Assassin* heterotemporality is linked with the strong gender component in the novel, which points back to Kristeva's *Women's Time* as an early text which raises very similar points in different terms. *White Teeth*, on the other hand, brings into close proximity various worlding projects with their own temporalities. But in both cases, it is through female agency that the hidden histories and its oppressive forces are revealed and confronted. The focus on female agency is also keeping both novels open to reinterpretation from decolonial point of view by unmasking the work of hegemonic, toxic masculinity which predominantly shapes our experiences, opening the space not only for different silenced voices, but also for different knowledges that need to be produced.

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Feminism, Art and Other Transformative Practices



Ena Jurov, *How Do Women Live?*
(*Courtesy of selma banich*)

In the Face of Catastrophe, the Return of *Différance* in the Art of Anabel Zanze

Silvana Carotenuto

Summary

The article deals with the *oeuvre* of Anabel Zanze, born in Dubrovnik in 1971, who created her initial visual experiments in the years of the Ex-Yugoslavian war. Its interpretative position is that the artist, by working inside the system of typography – Zanze studied at the Department of Graphic Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb – started and progressed in a series of creative operations that, by inserting writing in forms of letters, texts and literal and artistic quotations inside her paintings, provoke the concept and practice of *différance* to be productive of an insubordinate and deconstructive stand – in aesthetic and political terms.

The contribution reads some of Zanze's works according to the essay "Différance" by Jacques Derrida, and follows some of their innovative interventions in the system of art, and in the constitution of history, in order to provoke critical reflections on the question of esthetic processes of canonisation.

Keywords: female *différance,* writing, history, aesthetics

I will start with a 'return'. There are many returns to follow, sometimes with the shape of a 'square', other times in – the deformation of – a 'circle', or even providing the (public) space of a 'platform'. They are all drawn by the *différance* of feminist writing, which disseminates and keeps them open, always already claiming continuation, gathering, and sharing in women's debate and exchange.

The first return concerns the theme of our seminar. Last year, the Dubrovnik school enjoyed the chance of having the Brazilian philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva as our keynote speaker. The seminar took place during the Covid lockdown, but in spite of all difficulties, we worked online, intensively, and very successfully, with the radicality of da Silva's Black feminism.[1] Today, we confront even more painful times because of the historical degradation of the Ukraine conflict and, this year, the horror of the Palestinian genocide.[2] In such hard times, what does it mean to devote our seminar to art, aesthetics, and artivism? In the face of the lasting effects of the pandemic and the intensification of the violence of war, can art, aesthetics, and artivism constitute relevant matters for feminist reflection and discussion? It is the return of the

[1] See IUC web page dedicated to the 2021 seminar - https://iuc.hr/programme/1355

[2] It is important to remember that, in memory of their own experiences of war, the Croatian women present here, have been immediately responsive to the trauma of the Ukrainian war denouncing its horror on the global level. *Women's Appeal for Peace* was initiated by feminists and peace activists from Croatia on February 24, 2022, and supported by feminists and peace activists from the post-Yugoslav countries and the world. The appeal, which was followed by the list of signatories, recites: 'With consternation and disbelief, we are witnessing the escalation of the war and violence in Ukraine caused by the Russian invasion and the suspension of negotiations between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. As female citizens of Europe and the world, we demand from the Government of the Russian Federation to immediately cease hostilities, knowing that war is a crime against peace and humanity. At the same time, we urge all sides in conflict to continue the negotiations through diplomatic channels and to rely on all available non-violent means, to find appropriate solutions and ensure long-term peace and security in Ukraine, including the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. As peace activists and feminists, we strongly oppose any act of war by any state or international actor. We oppose the culture of violence based on permanent military armament, constructing, and producing of enemies, macho-militaristic competition, and creation of new military shields in the heart of Europe. We also oppose the public incitement to war by powerful states based on their geopolitical and financial interests, and warmongering atmosphere that promotes fear and anxiety among the people of Ukraine, but also among the citizens of neighbouring countries as well as citizens of Russia. As witnesses of the havoc of war and war iconography during the 1990s in our own country, we are aware of the harmful repercussions of the war and its long-lasting devastating effects on society, civilians, and the human community. We know all too well how divided communities in the post-war period suffer from trauma, and feelings of injustice, which makes the healing hard to achieve. For us, human security and the life of every human being is an ethical imperative for every political action, surpassing issues such as state-territorial interests, political independence, and military-defence security. Therefore, we demand for from the Government of the Republic of Croatia to actively support peace efforts to prevent further escalation of the conflict. We express our solidarity with all citizens of Ukraine and express our support for peace initiatives and anti-war movements in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus'. Available at: https://www.womenlobby.org/Women-s-Appeal-for-Peace?lang=en

philosophy of da Silva to respond to the concern on the validity and relevance of our chosen theme; in *Four Theses on Aesthetics*, written with Rizvana Bradley, da Silva claims the necessity of art even more urgently felt in times of 'catastrophe':

> Why rethink aesthetics now, when catastrophe has become the watchword of the day, and when all but the most restrictive pragmatism could easily be construed as little more than bourgeois frivolity? Is this not, after all, the age of Antonio Gramsci's "morbid symptoms," in which the many heads of fascism are rearing across the globe? Yet the fascism which liberal modernity and civil society have always required has never abided by this order's mendacious separation of the political from the aesthetic. Genocide, now as before, is an aesthetic project. The question, then, should not be why rethink aesthetics now, but rather how do we survive the aesthetic regime that carves and encloses the very shape of our question? (Bradley and da Silva 2021).[3]

In my contribution, the 'aesthetic regime' is questioned by the return of *différance*, in its binding with art, on the scene of critical thinking. It is the 'irreducible difference' that da Silva associates to the gestic imagination of Black feminism;[4] it signifies the 'spectacular difference' proposed by Okwui Enwezor when curating the new postcolonial inventions of art.[5] In both cases, it marks the return

[3] Denise Ferreira da Silva is interested in the artistic rendering of her philosophy thanks to her collaboration with the filmmaker Arjuna Neuman. The films *Serpent Rain*, 2016, and *4 Waters-Deep Implicancy*, 2018, were presented at the Dubrovnik School, 2021; their last work is *Soot Breath // Corpus Infinitum*, 2021.

[4] I am referring to da Silva's incitement to a 'divergent gestural difference': 'Rather than thinking blackness as difference notwithstanding worldly violence, we regard the serial recomposition and decomposition of blackness as incitation to an utterly divergent gestic imagination. Our critical attentiveness to these incitements remains attuned to a gestural difference that is irreducible, both to the serial violence of the racial regime of representation and to the so-called "politics" that clamours for recognition within it' (Bradley and da Silva 2021).

[5] The art critic Okwui Enwezor (2020) coined the term 'spectacular difference' as the principle by which he curated the Kassel edition of Documenta xi, through four platforms of conferences and debates, and the five locations of Vienna and Berlin, New Delhi, St Lucia, and Lagos. The ramifications of the innovative project were imagined in response to the present, which Enwezor thinks is connoted by 'profound historical chance and global transformation… across disciplinary and cultural boundaries'. In such difficult times, Documenta xi declared the impossibility of a unified, common and universal vision, and proposed its 'spectacular difference' to be viewed from 'the refractory shards thrown up by the multiple artistic space and knowledge circuits'. It followed a series of political, cultural and artistic claims: the event did not propose spaces of normalization or uniformation; its forums invited ethical and intellectual reflections; it identified the postcolonial order as the radical time-space for critical enunciation, embodying

of *différance*, initiated by Jacques Derrida and associated by his philosophy to writing: it is thanks to writing that *différance* is capable of deconstructing the order, hierarchy, and dialectics of the logocentric system of the western world – 'its domination, a mastery and ultimate appropriation' (Derrida 1982[1968]: 7). The claiming of *différance* – my contribution greatly benefits from the play of its 'traces' – happens within this 'catastrophic' system, to decree the difference from its authority and the deferment of its power, realising the strategical, adventurous, and historical dissemination of joyful openings to the other – vision, existence, world.

In what follows – itself blissed by the 'return' of a promise[6] – *différance* propels and sustains the art of Anabel Zanze. Responding to the dualistic system that rules the relationship between art and writing, Zanze calls for – and is called by – the *différance* of writing to realise her insubordination to / and deconstruction of the order, the hierarchy, and the authority of that same system – starting from the system of typography, which originated her artistic experiments. Zanze's *oeuvre* is written; it stages the art of writing and the writing of art, literally, meaning the poetics, the movements, the force and the passion of visual and aesthetic inscription, operated within the system, within which it insubordinates, deconstructs, and gradually announces the arrival of the other, the always-open return of female *différance*.

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the mediation and representation of the contestation of existing epistemological structures; the focus was on the experimental cultures expressing the resistance of the Empire's former 'other' in practices of decolonization that break with the colonial system defined by Valentine Y. Mudimbe as 'a dichotomizing system'. According to Enwezor, this system has come to a final crisis; in its wake, what emerges is the vastity of radical forms of 'spectacular difference' that convey the demands of the multitude, translating the margins to the centre, and, in so doing, representing what 'reconceptualizes the key ideological differences of the present global transitions'.

[6] I enjoy the chance of our gathering to devote my reading of female *différance* to a project that has stayed with me since my first participation to the Dubrovnik school. On the 'date of experience', I published on TripAdvisor the following comment: 'The vestal… I went there to see the beautiful exhibition of the Dubrovnik-born Zagreb-based artist Anabel Zanze. What fantastic experience: a beautiful exhibition place, fantastic paintings from contemporary Croatia; wonderful terrace facing Lokrum (a dream!), beautiful architecture and very hospitable people working there. I can only say that I am going to write on Zanze and will infinitely thank the Museum of Modern Art for its care, beauty, and educational mission! Thank you. Date of experience**:** May 2015'. Blessed by the Dubrovnik gathering, that allows me to realize the promise I made public at the time, I here engage with the visual contribution, the experimental adventure, and the 'play' – which already hints at the *différance* in my title – of the artwork by Anabel Zanze, the Croatian artist born in 1971 in Dubrovnik, now living and working in Zagreb.

Writing Art



Leaf (List), 1994.
Indian ink on paper,
181 × 157 mm
(photo: Goran Vranić)
(*Courtesy of the artist*)

> I will speak, therefore, of a letter. Of the first letter, if the alphabet, and most of the speculations which have ventured into it, are to be believed.
> I will speak, therefore, of the letter *a*, this initial letter which it apparently has been necessary to insinuate, here and there, into the writing of the word *différance*
> and to do so in the course of a writing on writing,
> and also of a writing within writing…
> (Jacques Derrida, "Différance")

The art of Anabel Zanze was born in times of historical catastrophe. In a post-war remembrance, she returns to the scene, evoked by the birthday of a painting, that dates a foundational change in her artistic career:

> It will soon be my painting's birthday, a full fifteen years has almost past since that silent Dubrovnik post-war autumn night in which, after I had got little baby Maura ready for bed, sat at the table, a miniature, camping, plastic table, the only one in my mother's kitchen, and said to myself: 'Everything you did in your student years, from 1992 to 1995, were just youthful wandering through

> the great expanses of painting discovered. Time to be your own person'. ('Recapitulation of First Letters': 114-5)[7]

Zanze became 'her own person' in signing *List* (Eng. *Leaf*), adding the textual elements of the letters l-i-s-t (spelling 'leaf' and/or 'sheet or paper') that moved obliquely and vertically towards the upper surface of the paper. A simple imprint, almost the drawing of a child, and a whole poetics was already at work in her artistic experimentation: the piece inscribed the lines of representation, the intervention of writing, the spaces animating the distance among the letters, the movements of their common inscription.

The 'leaf' functioned as the root or the radicality of what held Zanze's interest in the years-to-come. In the impossibility of reproducing the works that realise this interest, I will play – Zanze also paints of games, in *Tetris* (2009-10) and *Rubik's Surfaces I* (2009-11) – with their titles, all indicative, as the artist allows, of the 'questions' and 'interrogations' carried out by her artistic operations.[8] In the years that followed, Zanze continued to reflect on the *Ground Plan* (1997) of representation, on the *Fragment/ation* (II, 2001) of its printing surface, studying the painting's dimensions – *4x4* (2003), *Horizontal* (2004), *Diagonal Cross* (2004) – adding quotations (*Duchamp's Wheel*, 2006; Raymond Carver in *Invitations* (2005, 6, 7); Tess Gallagher in *Tess*, 2004), and, finally, composing her *Contents* (2007-8).

[7] Where not-otherwise indicated, I quote from the English text of the book by Anabel Zanze (2017), with the titles of the sections, and the indication of pages. Here, the quotation comes from a letter that the artist addressed to a friend, remembering, 15 years after the composition of *First Letters*, the work that dates 1994, in the aftermath of the ex-Yugoslav war, its re-appearance in *Second Letters*, presented for the first time in Zagreb in 2011, at the Mazuth Gallery. The return of Zanze's collage – which she says, represents 'a key for the understanding of what I am doing today' (Ibid., 15) – is relevant to my reading, especially in the claim that her work bears an inventive rewriting of History.

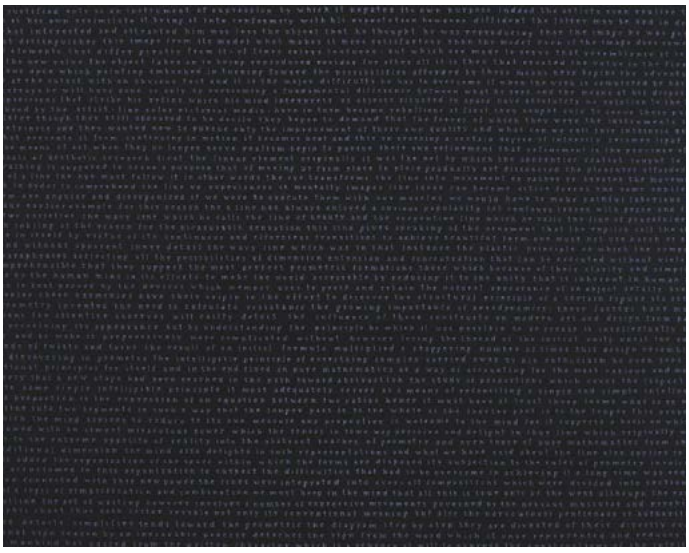
[8] Zanze says, 'It is clear that the titles of the series tell of their involvement in typographic materials' ('First Letters, Second Letters': 84).



Contents, 2007-2008.
Oil on canvas,
150 × 200 mm
(photo: Goran Vranić)
(*Courtesy of the artist*)

Gradually and experimentally, the structure of written signs and the interlacing, the weaving, the 'web' (which constitutes Zanze's recent interest in technology and social media) of threads and lines were making the material work, *oeuvre* and *opus* of her craft. It was – stays and returns as – the infinite production of collages and prints, the sequencing of letters, their differences marked by the – red, black, white, sandy-grey, ochre – lines testing out the properties and features of the printing support, the casting and pouring of pigments, the series of repetitions, nominations, quotation marks, allusions to the discourses of others – these traits all intended to contribute to the writing, splitting, erasing, scraping and re-scraping of Zanze's *Palimpsest* (2009).[9] It was – stays and returns as – the unique, singular, and consistent work of a typographer, a medieval scribe, the illuminator, the rubricator or the notary who incises, with the craft of her hand, endless manoeuvres rhythmed – the 'rhythmical organization' of 'pulsing or even of syncopation' ('Lacunae': 94) – by manual insistence.

[9] Zanze explains that, before the invention of paper, the original 'palimpsest' meant the support where scribes and notaries 're-scraped' their texts; the choice of her painting's title is related to 'the similarities with the processes of working pre-used parchments described' ('Palimpsests': 104).



Palimpsest 2009. Oil on paper,_1200 × 1500 mm (photo: Goran Vranić) (*Courtesy of the artist*)

In what follows, I strategically attempt at defining some 'phases' or 'cycles' in Zanze's poetics, focusing on her different and progressive operations of insubordination and deconstruction, the birth and the return of her joyful obsession, the germination and the development of the *différance* of her art.

In Spite of the Law

She creates *new fonts*… a *new script*.
(Nada Beroš, "Writing as Happening")[10]

Zanze declares herself insubordinate to 'the dichotomous nature of the system' that dualizes art and writing, searching for a 'different function' of the creative act:

> My dealings in art are founded on the combination of image and text, on impinging on the visual with the textual, on play with the lexical as an element in visual art. In this manner of work, there is a 'spillover of genres': text, which belongs primarily to the book, the journal or the newspaper, takes on a very *different* function on the painter's canvas than that to which we are accustomed. It is then the principal content of the painting, its leitmotif. ('Why Letters': 76, emphasis my own)

[10] Here the art critic suggests an interesting comparison of Zanze's work with the German conceptual artist Hanne Darboven.

The different function of representation consists in the play – 'the unity of chance and necessity in calculation without end' (Derrida 1982[1968]: 7) – of writing *différance* from the Law – against its 'regulatory model', as the philosopher insists (Ibid., 10), or 'in spite of the rules', as says Zanze ('Typographical Laws and Deviations': 82).[11] The operation can be described as a process of 'invagination': the text that interests the artist, is inscribed within the frame, inside the painting, within/across/inside/outside its *paregon*. When the art critic Petra Golušić speaks of Zanze's text being 'inpainted-into-the-painting', she refers to a craft by which what, according to the law and its rules, by norms, is considered marginal – letters, words, writing – moves to the centre of her work, provoking a sense of wonder, the visual sliding of sensibility and the critique of intelligibility both involved in the aesthetic experience (cf. Golušić 2015: 33). The operation is read by Martta Heikkilä as the deconstructive focus on 'the instability of the identity of a work of art', that happens whenever 'the margin, which usually frames the picture, enters the space of the figure', thus allowing 'the unconscious mind to take over as if 'without will'' (Heikkilä 2022; see also Heikkilä 2021). Identitarian instability, as claimed by Antonija Škrtić, chances the function of art, to which 'we are accustomed', in depth: '…the images in front of us convey meanings not to be grasped by reason…' (Škrtić 2012: 12), their drive lying in the research for 'the simulacrum of (the) text' (Beroš 2015: 17).

It is the emergence of the 'trace' that, by escaping all determination and meaning, places the identity of art under scrutiny, starting with the activity of 'seeing': Zanze, who is not concerned with exactitude, rather enjoys the happening of mistakes, the playful intervention, either by chance or in endless calculation, of lapses in spelling and graphic disorders in inscription.[12] Her enjoyment, indeed, invites to experiences

[11] Zanze explains that 'I don't abide by these laws, rather I work in spite of the rules sometimes even against them' ('Typographical Laws and Deviations': 82). Nada Beroš remarks that 'readability, the *condictio sine qua non* of every kind of typography, historical and contemporary, is precisely what this artist calls into question, asking the image to take on other meanings, functions and challenges' (Beroš 2015: 15).12 The deconstructive aspects of 'depth' are emphasised by Petra Golušić's remark: 'Depth does not know and has no end' (Golušić 2015: 33).

[12] In coining the word *différance*, Derrida is not apologetic for the 'mistake', the 'error' or the 'infraction' in his 'mis'/spelling; he rather proposes "a kind of insistent intensification of its play" (Derrida 1982[1968]: 3). This play happens in writing: in French, the difference between *différence* and *difference* reveals itself only

that are not meant to address the logic of Reason but the affects of Imagination – 'mine and the viewer's … awaking them from their slumber and setting them in motion' ('Invitations': 87).[13] It follows the critique of logocentric 'reading' – 'the moment we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, intuit its presence' (Derrida 1982[1968]: 9) – which, in Zanze, calls for a non-authoritarian relation with its object, which is not to be observed and framed, but shared in affective experiences – 'the immersion and effort of the whole body' (Beroš 2015: 17). The artist privileges the form of poetry to address her intention:

> Master printers know methods
> for reducing
> the reading effort.
> …I do the opposite.
> A tiny line space. A line too long.
> By collaging the text, I make fluent reading impossible.
> The text says a lot about full and void.
> I want the painting to talk about the same thing ('A Letter to Ivana R.': 132).

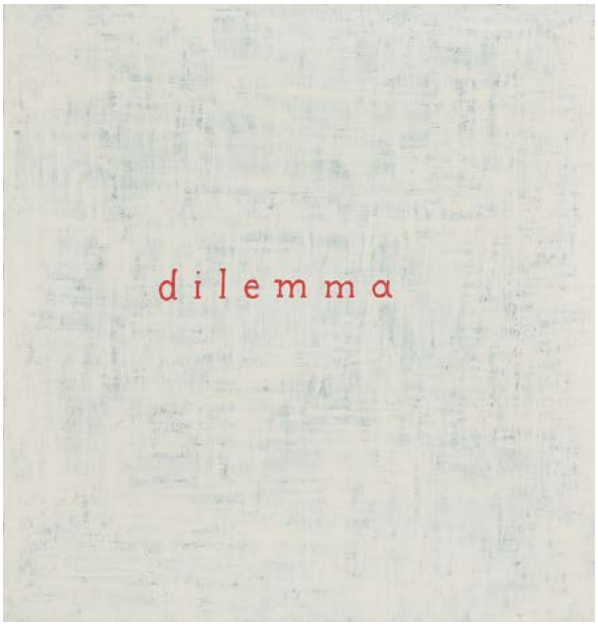
in writing; it can only be seen on the written page; there is no difference in sound; the difference cannot be heard, remaining silent, secret and discreet. It is in only writing that the neo-graphism can be noticed. In the realm of art, Zanze explains that "I use 'errors' in the writing, the omission of some letters or lines and so on to show that a visual text is not the same as a literary text" ('Text as Image': 80); "I make use of cuts, 'mistakes' in the writing, omission of some words or lines to show that the painted texts is not the same as the book text." (quoted in Beroš 2015:21). Both the philosopher and the artist find the element of 'irony' in the misspelling; Derrida speaks of "some mute irony, the inaudible misplacement, of this literal permutation" (1982 [1968]: 3); in Zanze, 'irony' reveals the contemporaneity of her involvement in political dissidence: "I am also directing irony at myself – not even one's own work can avoid the consumer system and the appropriate fate… By using newsprints as means in the making of a work of art and text as paintings, I want to record the dichotomous nature of the system" ('Note': 138).

[13] The 'format' of the work includes the "post office side… lines for writing out the address, a field for the stamp and terse information about the gallery, date of the opening, telephone numbers of the salon and other things" ('Invitations': 86).

The Book



The Book, Page 55, 2012. Acrylic on paper, 290 × 280 mm (photo: Goran Vranić) (*Courtesy of the artist*)



The Book, Page 91, 2012. Acrylic on paper, 290 × 280 mm (photo: Goran Vranić) (*Courtesy of the artist*)

> But the text does, after all, mean something.
> Then the references by secret or open passages.
> (Anabel Zanze, 'A Letter to Ivana R.')

The greatest resource for Zanze is the inscription of letters (that 'freely float over the surface of the painting', 'Enlargements': 92),

words, sentences, essays and parts of essays. In their 'in/visibility' – as in *Lacunae* (2008) or *Fields* (2008), where the artist plays 'with a reduced space between the lines and with an increased gap between the words' ('Fields': 96) – they do not belong to the realm of presence but to the crossing of appearance and disappearing: they are sometimes emphasized by colours; sometimes they hide in their endless flux. They enter the painting already formed, in *media res*, starting from, carrying to, and reaching out for 'elsewhere'. They do not originate, and have no end, lining inside, outside and with/out the frame with the finality to transport into *Labyrinths* (I, II, IV, IX, 2009) that trace the enigma of their taking place: "Writing as happening", as Nada Beroš entitles, is inviting to its 'polysemous journeys':

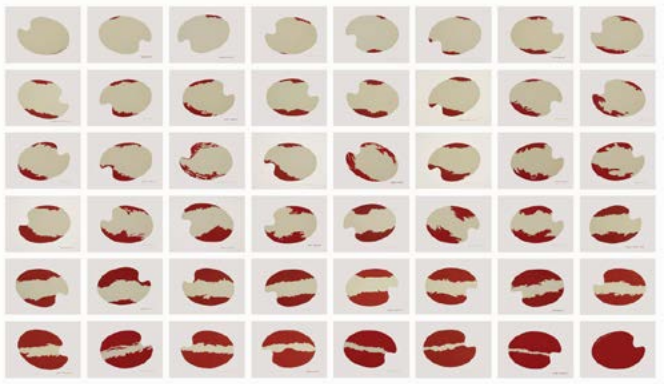
> I endeavour to encourage the interested viewer to take polysemous journeys along my labyrinths of letters, words and sentences, to discover *different* connotations that he or she will decipher to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their knowledge, adaptability, intuition and concentration too. ('Why Letters?': 76, emphasis my own)

The invitation to discover the 'different connotations' of art resounds with the 'diversity in unity' composing Zanze's Book. Germinations of leaves, invisible lacunae and fields, textual dis/composing, sequencing, inserting, citing – they all produce the *Book of Writing* (2011, dedicated to Josip Vaništa) and *The Book* (2011-12). Here, everything is 'strategic' and 'adventurous', marking the intensification of the distance of *différance* – 'an interval, a distance, *spacing*', says Derrida (1982[1968]: 8):

> Paintings are, primarily, visual facts. As observers approach the work from a *distance*, at first they do not gather that they will be greeted on the canvases with rows of densely written letters, arranged according to some laws of their own, depending on which cycle of works we are concerned with. Then from some *distance*, they will notice images in which black and white vie for domination, see a play of geometrical figures, sometimes on the borders of Op Art and the like.
>
> But moving closer to the picture at a certain *distance* what had previously seemed like a black or grey impenetrable surface will turn into signs of letters linked into words, sentences, arranged in lines that might fill up the whole surface of the paintings. At that time the painting starts working at its textual level as well. ('Visual/Textual': 78, emphasis my own)

After the deconstruction of seeing and reading, the play of distance affects the 'touch': in the exhibition of *The Book*, 98 paintings-drawings are closed off in a transparent Perspex body, with the small paper support of a page 290 x 280 mm; to the critic's surprise, these material constrains result 'in still greater discipline and yet, paradoxically, in greater freedom' (Beroš 2015: 18). It must be Zanze's inventiveness in crossing – near and far, full and void, left and right, narrow and broad, low and high – lines of writing, distance intensifying concentration, with/out any tactile appropriation…

The Kingdom of History



Mappa Mundi, 2012-2013. Acrylic on paper, 48 × [240 × 320 mm] (photo: Goran Vranić) (*Courtesy of the artist*)

… *différance* is not. It is not a present being,
however, excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent.
It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority.
It is not announced by any capital letter.
Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*,
but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.
Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded
by everything within us that desires a kingdom,
the past or future presence of a kingdom.
(J. Derrida, "Différance")

'…the text is reduced, muffled and dreamed, but it still there' ('A Letter to Ivana R.': 134) – inside, outside and with/out the system of history, the history of art, of the word, of the world. Responding to the 'motif of a final repression of difference', Derrida claims that '*differance* is no more static than it is genetic, no more structural than historical' (Derrida 1982[1968]: 11-12).

History is at the core of what Zanze has created since *The Book*, soon followed by her *Instructions* (I, II, 2012) and her *Studies* (2012) on how to write, read, and perceive *otherwise*:

> … small formats… at greater speed… innovative ideas… different changes of a linguistic, drawing or painting nature… more slowly… a greater distance… the difference between writing out text on paper and carving text in stone ('Studies': 116).

It is the return of the writing of *différance* or the *différance* of writing: after 15 years, *First Letters* (1996) – 'the starting point of my work' ('Recapitulations of First Letters': 114) – recapitulates in *Second Letters* (2011), to include, in parenthesis, the 'multiple directions' ('First Letters, Second Letters': 84) of *(Blocks, Pages, Labyrinths, Palimpsests, Ns, Fragments, Black Figures, Composition with White).* Circularity calls for the determination-displacement of all the elements at play, thus advancing the artist's deconstruction of language: 'Parts of Speech' (2012; in 180 x 240 mm series, in its concern with '(nouns, verbs and so on), related with visual art, linguistic and communological themes and mental states', 'Parts of Speech': 118) includes, in parenthesis, the 'multiple directions' of *(Diptych, Dialogue, Dilemma, Distance, Harmonia, Illusion, Remarque, Gorgoning, Dividing Line 2).* The deconstruction of total language opens the scrutiny of 'Mappa Mundi' (2012-13), which consists of the forty-eight acrylics on paper organized in segments, panels or palettes – with a minimum deviation of their axis – that return the 'desire for a kingdom' to 'the kineticism of the total impression' ('Square: Origin and Disappearance': 101):

> … soil erosion, the shifting of tectonic plates, the domination of land and sea surface …until on the last fragment of the whole the play of duality stops. ('Mappa Mundi': 122)

The 'atlas' of the new world deforms its principle of representation: on the surface of the painting, the first palette is empty of colour; its oval shape or slanting sphere is gradually filled with the density of lands and territories emerging, and covering, at the end of the line, near the bottom, the whole painting with English red. One year later, it is the time of *Figures and Double-Faces* (2013), the work that consigned 'the result of a search for radically synthesized figure that would suggest two opposites… I was interested how far it was possible to go in the simplification of figural signs and how widely in the creation of associations that were provoked by two distant words' ('Figures and Double-Faces': 120).

The 'platform'

In her search along the 'multiple directions' of the history of art, of the word, of the world, Zanze insists on the line, deforming it, inscribing it *otherwise*. Her experiments enjoy the invagination of writing; cycling and circling shapes subvert the – artistic, linguistic and historical – drive to totalization;[14] when the 'perfect form' of the square returns, it encodes its *différance* from the history of technology and industrialization:

> My squares are like screens, my reaction, among other things, to the age of information technology and the information revolution. The hitherto characteristic playful gestural expression has vanished in me; my hand is turned into the hand of the everyday, the consumable, it is turned literally into the letter, the text taking on the role of texture on the surface of a square/a painting and is redirected, coded. ('Writing': 137)

> My B1 format collages are an echo of the real world, of urban, industrialized society. Sometimes there are details of buildings, of city walls, sometimes there are ground plans of whole megalopolises, and sometimes there are abstractions. Playing with black and white files smaller and larger squares, I seek my perfect form for just it: for *my* square. ('Note': 138)

My 'square' advances Zanze's re-writing of history, her analysis of the tension embedded in the text. (Zanze: 2019.) In the exhibition 'Letterocracy', held in 2022 at the National Museum of Modern Art in Zagreb, the artist considers, more explicitly that ever, the nodality of some specific historical

[14] The deconstruction of the circle plays an important role in the development of Zanze's art: 'A few years back I was occupied with the natural world and the world of the starry space in which mankind is seen as both big and tiny. In the world of nature and that of the universe one of the dominant forms is the circle. The planet Earth is round, and the rest of the celestial bodies, the atoms and tier particles, the cell form which life is created and a lot else beside. In my student days I was very keen on drawing such oval forms, attempting to represent germs, cyclotrons, the starry spaces, the storms of the sky… All of this was expressed in a hand characterised by the rapid brushstroke, concision of expression, and the already mentioned domination of the circular form. People, to make it easier to live in their own world, have had to square it. Their measure of things, if I observe it properly, is quadripartite. For example, beds and blanket, pillows, wardrobes, houses, doors and windows (the first houses were oval), chairs and tables, books, rubbers, televisions, boxes, drawers and finally computers. We have divided human characters into four basic types, time into four seasons, space has been defined by east, west, and so on ad infinitum. And so I too decided to work in art in terms of the square' ('Writing': 136-137).

events. In *Bring Back the Magnolia* (2020), sixteen oil paintings quote the slogan advocating transparency in the management policies of the 'green' city of Zagreb, strongly criticising the felling of the magnolia in front of the Meštrović Pavilion. Zanze comments, 'If it were growing in a more civilized part of the world (I am currently imagining Japan), our magnolia would have still nourished a micro-eco-system in its canopy and under it, and many would have sighed in admiration when it bloomed'. (quoted in National Museum of Modern Art, 2022). Another example is *The Young Patrician Woman* (2022), the polyptych which refers to the painting by Vlaho Bukovac which was expropriated from the National Museum of Modern Art, after the court ruled that the work belonged to the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. These are political interventions that call for a last inventive operation: at the exhibition, the viewer-reader is invited to a (public) *Agora* (2022) – the square or 'platform' where she can interact, comment, and reflect upon the letters, the words, the texts, the book and the world writing the *différance* of Zanze's art…

The cost…

'I have no alternative, I have to go on with what I have started, no matter what the cost', says Zanze (quoted in Beroš, 2015: 25). If it is impossible to quantify the cost of the *différance* of her art, a provisional conclusion might claim that whatever she has started and has been carrying on in her operations of insubordination and deconstruction, she has not been alone. In 2011, the series *Rasters* is dedicated to women writers, inscribing, 'countless times', in 'tireless repetition' ('Rasters': 98), their first names: *Tess* (Gallagher), *Anaïs* (Nin), *Sylvia* (Plath), *Ivana* (Brlić Mažuranić). Inside a perpendicular grid, a fine lacy structure connects their endless inscriptions with the 'formula' of Gertrude (Stein)'s differential repetition: "a rose is a rose is a rose". Perhaps, the *différance* of Zanze's art stays and returns as the poetic embroidery of its 'polymorphous journeys' to be intimately shared with other women, other infinite travellers…

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The Complicated Position of Ethnic Roma in Art and Culture Today[1]

Jasmina Tumbas

Summary

Tumbas probes feminist approaches to socially engaged art within the context of the ongoing discrimination of ethnic Roma in Europe. Homing in on a range of practices of resistance, Tumbas puts into dialogue works by artists that have addressed the complicated positions of ethnic Roma in Europe, such as Selma Selman, Marika Schmiedt, Tamara Moyzes, and Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, along with the celebrated play *Roma Armee* at Maxim Gorki Theatre. Tumbas thinks through diverse burdens these artists, especially female-identified and queer artists, carry as makers of politically transgressive content within cultural milieus that are long rooted in primitivizing discourses. Urgencies for political transformation through art clash with questions of emancipatory self-representation as art, a tension these artists negotiate in diverse ways to confront prevailing nationalism, racism, and violence in Europe.

Keywords: Ethnic Roma, Feminist Art, Art and Activism, Contemporary Art, Resistance, Art and Violence, Censorship

Crowning the March 2021 cover of *ELLE* magazine (Serbia), performance artist Selma Selman flaunted a confident gaze to fashion and art lovers alike, bathing in a signature "feminist"

[1] This article was first published with the same title in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 86, no. 1, 2023, pp. 2-14, available at: https://doi.org/10.1515/ZKG-2023-1003 (accessed January 3, 2024). I developed the ideas for the article over two years, and presented part of my research and ideas in two seminars at IUC in Dubrovnik, first in 2021 at the 14th Postgraduate Course, and then again in 2022, at the 15th Postgraduate course. I attended both courses via zoom.

pink background wearing a lacy black dress, with her arms raised and one hand holding long- stemmed pink anthurium flowers (fig. 1). Labeled "The Most Dangerous Woman in the World" on the magazine's cover,[2] Selma Selman's name loomed large in white letters, signaling that the magazine was not showcasing an unnamed fashion model, but an attractive and charismatic star. Next to her were added the lines "Stories of Sisterhood and Solidarity."[3] In a social media post on February 21, 2021, announcing her cover, the artist noted: "As a child of the ghetto – an ugly, poor nobody – I could barely stay afloat in my small town. Now, as a grown woman, I fly over the oceans of the world. And I am still me."[4]

Fast forward a year later, as I am writing this essay, and Selman's work is featured at popular contemporary exhibitions like *Manifesta 14* in Prishtina, Kosovo and *documenta 15*, in Kassel, Germany, and she made the cover of another fashion magazine, the October 2022 Serbian issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. This time, Selman is wearing a black cowboy hat paired with dark red, armlength leather gloves. The cover headline declares: "A New Era of Optimism,"[5] implicitly celebrating the ascension of this young performance artist of ethnic Romani descent, who, against all odds, has reached the ranks of the beautiful and famous. Inside the magazine's pages, we find more photographs of the artist, and an interview that emphasizes her ascent: "How the young artist Selma Selman literally turned the heritage and the past of *her people* [implied: ethnic Roma] into gold and platinum."[6]

Beauty emerges as a complicated political feminist statement for Selman, whose body is marked as being tied to "*her people*," on behalf of whom she is thought to be transcending racially charged poverty with her personhood and art. To frame her in this way summons difficult discussions about racial politics in Europe. Romani activist

[2] *ELLE* Spring 2021 issue (Serbian original: "Najopasnija žena na svetu"). See also ELLE x H&M: Upoznajte Selmu Selman, najopasniju ženu na svetu (ELLE x H&M: Meet Selma Selman, the World's Most Dangerous Woman) on *ELLE SERBIA*, February 22, 2021, available at: https://elle.rs/Stav/Intervju/a24481/ELLE-x-H-M-Upoznajte-Selmu-Selman-najopasniju-zenu-na-svetu.html (accessed 11 December 2022).

[3] Serbian original: "Priče o sestrinstvu i solidarnosti".

[4] Selma Selman, *Instagram* post (21 February 2021), available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CLj3D1Gh4DC/ (accessed 3 January 2023).

[5] Serbian original: "Nova era optimizma."

[6] Author's emphasis. See "Selma Selman: Kreacija mašte I alhemija modernog doba," in *Harper's Bazaar*, October 2022, 180–189, here 181. The interview is also available online, available at: https://www.harpersbazaar.rs/8-fab-years/8-fab-years/selma-selman-kreacija-maste-i-alhemija-modernog-doba (accessed 11 December 2022).

and scholar Ioanida Costache has described "the Romani status as a negative referent for European whiteness," stressing that ethnic Roma and their histories of discrimination "remain unincorporated into global discussions of coloniality and white supremacy," and arguing that "the academy and wider society should recognize the Roma as central figures in present day reckonings about past racial injustice" (Costache 2021). Indeed, while racial justice movements have recently made significant strides towards critiquing whiteness in culture and art, especially in the United States, such social and political changes have not emerged in Europe with regard to ethnic Roma, despite the increased violence against this ethnic group in the post-socialist era.[7] As such, Selman's prominence on the covers of fashion magazines calls for an art historical consideration of how intersectional feminist approaches collide with the politics of non-white visibility of ethnic Roma within contemporary art and culture.



1 *Selma Selman on the cover of ELLE*, Spring 2021

[7] The Roma MoMA blog hosted on the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) website, and initiated in conjunction with OFF-Biennale Budapest, is an important platform that is advancing research on contemporary debates regarding ethnic Roma in art, politics, and culture by offering in-depth essays, reviews, images, and other documents. Available at: https://eriac.org/category/romamoma/ (accessed 23 December 2022).

While feminist and queer women of color have been the leading forces behind the Black Lives Matter and Decolonize This Place movements in the US, among many others, which have changed how museums and educators display and discuss art by non-white artists and collectives, many feminists of Roma origins have to contend with demands to erase their racial identities. Here, I am thinking of the experience scholar and activist Ethel Brooks described in her encounter with a feminist at a conference, who told Brooks: "If you want to claim feminism, then you must give up your claim to a Romani identity. Patriarchy and oppression to women are central to your culture; to be a feminist means renouncing being a Romani woman" (Brooks 2012: 2).The xenophobic entitlement underlying this request – presuming a monolithic and narrow definition of "Roma identity" while also laying claim over who gets to belong to or shape the future of feminism – insinuates that for feminists attached to the right types of progressive cultures, emancipation does not require surrendering their cultural, national, or ethnic identities (such as whiteness). But the hostility towards Brooks also reveals additional sacrifices women of colour are forced to consider, if they assimilate: "If I join the side of the feminists, denying my connection to the Romani community, would that, in the end, save my Romani sisters?" (Ibid., 3).

Positing herself as "The Most Dangerous Woman in the World" who is committed to sisterhood and solidarity, as declared on *ELLE's* cover, Selman seems not to choose sides; she embraces her emancipation while also strategically playing with her role as a menacing outsider, in body-centered works that posit her as a feared yet desired object of exoticization and fascination. For her performance *Platinum* at the National Gallery of Sarajevo (2021), Selman worked with family members to mechanically remove dirty catalytic converters from discarded scrap metal of cars, and with the help of experts, chemically extracted their platinum, and created a tiny platinum ax.[8] The physical strength and ingenuity such an artwork requires harkens back to her family's livelihood of extracting valuable metals from discarded commodities, labour typically ascribed to ethnic Roma. Defying the worn-out clichés of Carmen as femme fatale in the media, the artist's performances

[8] See *Platinum*, Selma Selman's website, available at: https://www.selmanselma.com/ (accessed 8 December 2022).

often culminate in spectacular images of an attractive, young, long- haired feminist swinging large axes at turned-over washing machines and other household appliances in public squares; not an angry feminist letting off steam, but a working woman providing for her family (fig. 2).

Selman was an unlikely candidate for this break through into celebrity culture, being part of a deeply detested minority that is discriminated against in Europe and whose members rarely, if ever, have graced the covers of exclusive fashion magazines while participating in elite art biennials. Instead, in the history of visual art and culture, what we have typically seen is non-Roma exploit Romani traditions in the name of modern art, advertisements, fashion, and contemporary film. However, when I recently spoke at an academic feminist conference about Selman's image on the *ELLE* cover, touting it as an important moment for thinking through the thorny intersections between beauty, feminism, racial justice, and practices of resistance, Selman's feminism was also met with hostility: during the Q&A after my talk, a feminist scholar and activist expressed her indignation, adding that she would like to "burn" the *ELLE* cover image of Selman. She did not elaborate, but the implication was that there could be nothing feminist about Selman's "selling out" to a magazine that celebrates the commodification of women's beauty. While this line of critique has its crucial place in feminist discourses aimed at exposing misogyny in culture and art, it ignores an important geopolitical aspect of Selman's breakthrough: as an ethnic minority from Bosnia and Herzegovina, she is now celebrated in Serbia, where, as elsewhere in the marginalized regions of former Yugoslavia (and Europe), horrid conditions of discrimination for ethnic Roma remain the status quo, as do stereotypes of criminality and humiliating poverty. Thus, Selman forces readers to face an ethnic Romani woman defying those confines as an up and coming, transnational figure in the arts who seeks to foster feminist solidarity in the region and beyond. But as with Brooks a decade prior, Selman's feminism is seen as somehow tainted, as not belonging, or even worse, as adversary to feminism's goals for emancipation. Fame and beauty, however, are exactly what have forced this reckoning with new directions in feminist liberation.



2 Selma Selman, video documentation of *Self-Portrait Performance*, 2016, Rijeka, Croatia

Mainstream feminism has been accused of selling out to commercial culture, especially recently, but the implications vary and are complicated by questions of race. One must only think of Susan Faludi's *New York Times* essay from June 2022, "Feminism Made a Faustian Bargain with Celebrity Culture. Now It's Paying the Price," where the author delivered a scathing and persuasive analysis of just how counter-productive celebrity or pop feminism has been in advancing women's rights in the last decade. Faludi thinks through numerous examples of feminist politics entering elite popular and celebrity culture, such as Beyoncé's branding of herself as feminist at the 2014 MTV Awards or the #MeToo movement, to argue that the "viral solidarity" that was to "hasten change" did bring about change, but not the far-reaching feminist transformation we hoped for; what's worse, right-wing conservative movements against women's autonomy were quietly gaining power and political traction while celebrity feminism, or as Faludi diagnoses – "celebrity-besotted and self-absorbed times" – has distracted the left from doing the work needed on the round (Faludi 2022).

To be sure, one might read *Harper's Bazaar's* "new optimism" as epitomizing Lauren Berlant's cautioning exegesis of what she termed "cruel optimism," the seductive promise of "the good life," which is always out of reach and which actually impedes happiness and fulfilment (Berlant 2011: 2).In this regard, the magazine's catchy if bizarre note that Selman is "turning her heritage into gold and platinum," inadvertently yields a racialized rhetoric

levelled at Selman's relative commercial success: while *Harper's Bazaar* is alluding to her work of collecting and transforming metal scraps with her family for her performance *Platinum*, the statement undercuts her success as an artist by echoing a common racist prejudice held against non-white individuals, namely that their achievements are only possible because they are willing to spin anything – including their own families and the hardships of "their people" – into gold. This disparaging line of thinking easily lends itself to dismissing the political stakes of her socially engaged art as a feminist and woman of colour.



3 Marika Schmiedt, *Thoughts Are Free*, exhibition installation photograph, Linz, Austria, 2013

Those who engage in feminist, political, and activist art repeatedly have to face the burden of cruel optimism, and of being doubted, when tasked with facilitating change, raising awareness, and opening up dialogues about some of the most pressing political issues of our times, such as widespread economic inequalities exacerbated by racial and gender injustices. Here, it is useful to apply Faludi's stands on feminism to socially engaged art: "Celebrity feminism is based on the idea that a celebrity can instigate change by representing a cause .... Virtue becomes a vanity. No longer are you doing something; you're being something" (Faludi 2022). In the case of non-white artists whose ethnic or racial backgrounds often become the focal point of analysis and expectations, especially when institutions

try to "diversify" their exhibitions, collections, or employees, this conflation between "representing" and "being" something is all too familiar. For this reason, artists like Marika Schmiedt often emphasize that they are artists first, and not "Roma artists," avoiding being "branded" and used as a homogenizing representative of an entire ethnic group.[9]But when artists make it too big, they are habitually charged with vanity and exploiting their racial otherness for profit, or with offending well-intentioned democracies by highlighting structural inequalities and racism.

Fame then easily turns into infamy, as in the case of Schmiedt, whose April 2013 exhibition in Linz, Austria–*Thoughts Are Free*– exposed and critiqued the appallingly racist and extreme right-wing rhetoric circulating in Europe at the time, especially in Hungary under the leadership of Viktor Orbán (fig. 3). Her work included provocative images of Orbán's face paired with a "Gypsy cooked Salami" and of neo-Nazis marching in Hungary proclaiming: "We attacked the Gypsies, and we are proud of it" (Schmiedt 2013). Further, she exposed shocking instances of contemporary politicians degrading ethnic Roma, as when a mayor in a Slovak town publicly called on them to "eat" stray dogs (Ibid., 2-3).[10] Mounted in the public for everyone to see in the city center, her works were destroyed within two days by local police without informing her. A Hungarian tour guide, who had physically attacked Schmiedt at the opening, promptly reported the artist to the police with the absurd claim

[9] The curators of the 2011 exhibition, *Reconsidering Roma: Aspects of Roma and Sinti Life in Contemporary Art*, which also included Schmiedt's work, began to problematize the use of the label "Roma art" or "Roma artists," "avoiding," as Lith Bahlman notes, "branding them with the 'ethno-label' along the way" (Bahlman 2011: 12). See also essay by Denisa Tomkova (2021) where the author scrutinizes the notion of "Roma art" and its potential for transformative solidarity. Others, like Schmiedt, along with activist and scholar Filis Demirova also have criticized the continued use of term "Antigypsyism" ("Antiziganismus"), arguing that the term "gypsy" ("Zigeuner") reproduces, and is linked to, the racism that informed the murder and discrimination of Roma and Sinti for centuries (preferred: Anti-Romaism). See "Werspricht in der Antiziganismusforschung?," published on *DER PARIA*, March 26, 2013, available at: https://derparia.com/2013/03/26/wer-spricht-in-der-antiziganismusforschung/ (accessed 11 December 2022).

[10] For images of the exhibition before and after it was censored, see Jasmina Tumbas, "Marika Schmiedt's Exhibition at Construction Site in Linz, Austria: Posters Ripped Down, the Artist Threatened and Attacked at Opening by Outraged Hungarian Nationalist and her Austrian Husband," on *ArtLeaks*, April 19, 2013, available at: https://art-leaks.org/2013/04/19/marika-schmiedts-exhibition-at-construction-site-in-linz-austria-posters-ripped-down-the-artist-threatened-and-attacked-at-opening-by-outraged-hungarian-nationalist-and-her-austri/ (accessed December 15, 2022).

that Schmiedt's work was racist, and with the added charge that she was defaming the Hungarian nation and its people.[11] This destruction of Schmiedt's art was particularly egregious when considering that her work was well-known and had—at that point—thematized the violence ethnic Roma experienced during and since World War II in Europe for more than a decade, especially by shedding light on the devastating history of her grandmother being murdered during the Holocaust and her mother's harsh journey through the Austrian system thereafter (*Ibidem*).

In the place of glamour and concomitant vanity à la Faludi, the circulation of the artist's name and face in the media resulted in increased threats and harassment.[12] Schmiedt is not a hashtag artist; she is a fervent researcher and provocateur who makes people uncomfortable. Few want to be in proximity of such shocking work, let alone repost it on social media, as Schmiedt's art does not shy away from showing racialized violence, swastikas, and other disturbing images and facts in her work. The cover image for her catalogue, *Thoughts Are Free*, is a perfect example: not a glamourous fashion shoot, but a simple self-portrait, taken at home on her own device, with a Hitler mustache drawn on her upper lip (fig. 4). Sardonically titled *Roma Integration*, Schmiedt posits that integration for ethnic Roma requires and demands conformism to fascist principles in purportedly democratic societies like Austria and Hungary. It is no surprise then that government officials have urged for more censorship of her work, such as the (failed) request by the Hungarian ambassador to Austria, Vince Szalay Bobrovniczky, to cancel the same exhibition, *Thoughts Are Free*, planned at Linz City Hall in October of the same year, because he deemed it "racist" and "anti-Hungarian."[13]

[11] To read my previous discussion of this incident and Schmiedt's work, please see Jasmina Tumbas (2018: 103-127).

[12] For example, Schmiedt received messages calling her a "dirty German Gypsy Whore," "Gypsy louse," and "psychologically ill," and she was told to keep her "hands off my democratic country, Hungary ... hands off my prime minister." Schmiedt shared screenshots of the threatening messages sent in 2013, in online correspondence with the author, December 21, 2022.

[13] Even though Linz City Hall received hundreds of emails calling for the cancellation of Schmiedt's exhibition, inspired by the ambassador's campaign against Schmiedt's art, the exhibition was shown (and not destroyed). For more information, see Milana Knezevic (2013).



4 Marika Schmiedt, *Roma Integration*, photograph, Vienna, Austria, 2012

If feminists are to burn the image of Selman, and nationalists and the police destroy the art of Schmiedt, what does that tell us about the precarious position of contemporary artists who are ethnic Roma and invested in socially engaged art? What other cases of upward mobility are "too much" for potential allies? What kinds of critiques of the status quo are too offensive? Not offensive enough? On what grounds do we judge whether or not a work of art perpetuates or upends political injustice? How does one measure what effect the circulation of Selman's image–say, for example, in the Roma communities of Bihać or other parts of the region–has, where young girls, perhaps for the first time, see a powerful woman on a magazine cover, who looks like them? How do we measure whether Schmiedt's forceful critiques of fascist histories and conditions in Europe have incited change? What other "issues" are artists like Schmiedt and Selman accused of having "failed" to address? My point is that artists have every right to betray or go against expectations of feminists, curators, nationalists, ambassadors, the police, and whoever else is watching. But to be identified as a socially engaged artist with ethnic Roma origins is to live with the added pressure to speak to, and solve, social and political problems in ways that Roma and non-Roma alike, even if allies, project on such individuals.

Given the inescapable probability of misunderstanding, misrepresenting, wronging, and ultimately, exploiting artists with complex backgrounds and histories of erasure and oppression, leaders in the cultural spheres that center ethnic Roma insist on being included, and treated as agents, when narratives about, and plans for, ethnic Roma are proposed and produced. In 2014, the European Roma Rights Centre held a conference in Budapest, which took a pointed political stance: *Nothing about Us without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production*.[14] While some of us writing from ivory towers might contemplate the futility of optimism today, those individuals and collectives who do the work of pioneering change on the ground rely on hope to continue the fight. "[D]espite the setbacks and disappointments of the past, a new sense of idealism and optimism may be emerging," organizers of *Nothing about Us without Us?* noted, adding: "This is an invaluable resource, for without a 'pedagogy of hope' the Romani Movement would stagnate" (Bogdán *et al.* 2015: 3).

A transformative sense of agency, hope, and resistance is especially apparent in a new generation of artists and creators who share the background of being ethnic Roma, such as the sisters Sandra and Simonida Selimović. Originally from former Yugoslavia, their family left Serbia in the late 1980s to work as "Gastarbeiters" (guest workers) in Austria, a few years before the wars began.[15] Together, the sisters founded *Romano Svato* in 2010, the first feminist and professional Roma theater association in Vienna. They are also known for writing and acting in *Roma Armee,* put on by the Israeli director Yael Ronen, which became a hit at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin in 2017.[16] On a stage that abounds with dynamic artworks by Damian Le Bas and Delaine Le Bas– two eminent artists whose work had a decade prior been featured in Tímea Junghaus's 2007 *Paradise Lost: The First Roma Pavilion* at the Venice Biennial – *Roma Armee* confronts the continued racism ethnic Roma face in Europe through the varied experiences of its

[14] The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), *Nothing about Us without Us? Roma Participation in Policy Making and Knowledge Production* (Roma Rights, 2), Budapest 2015, available at: http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/roma-rights-2-2015-nothing-about-us-without-us.pdf (accessed January 2, 2023).

[15] Zwei Schwestern spielen gegen das Roma Klischeean, in *B. Z. Berlin*, 19 September 2017, available at: https://www.bz-berlin.de/archiv-artikel/zwei-schwestern-spielen-gegen-das-roma-klischee-an (accessed December 11, 2022).

[16] See *Roma Armee,* on the Maxim Gorki Theater website, available at: https://www.gorki.de/en/roma-armee (accessed December 11, 2022).

cast members, who, with the exception of two, identify as Roma. Offering a gender non-conforming, queer, enchantingly free-spirited, and fiercely feminist ethos, *Roma Armee* has mesmerized audience members and critics alike.



5 *Roma Armee*, 2017, Promotional photograph featuring Sandra Selimović *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 86, 2023

Splendour, fashion, and humour reign supreme in *Roma Armee*, beckoning the alluring atmospheres of Berlin cabarets and drag shows, which will dazzle even the most unnerved viewer at one point or another. The Maxim Gorki Theater's promotional image for *Roma Armee* features a highly polished and stunning photograph of Sandra Selimović (fig. 5), which echoes the fashion magazine styles discussed above. Identifying herself as "Roma, queer, and lesbian" in the play, Selimović displays shame for none of it, and neither do her fellow cast mates, all of whom share recollections of childhood and adolescent poverty, as well as being bullied and debased by others. But the image of Selimović conveys the strength, not the agony, of surviving those battles. Parading her flawless face, along with her trimmed body – accentuated by a see-through, military

camouflage patterned shirt and golden shorts – Selimović is holding a semi-automatic pistol in one hand and in the other, an ammunition belt that wraps around her neck and down her torso touching her bare, upper thigh. A background of ferns and other plants on a metal fence completes the military chic style, replete with alluring fantasies of queer and feminist revenge from another unlikely candidate for such authority: an *ethnic Roma* who identifies as "macho," "gender-liquid," queer, and a lesbian, intimately familiar with what it means to be a poverty-stricken immigrant from Ex-Yugoslavia coming of age in the unwelcoming West in the 1990s.

As someone who ticks the latter three boxes myself, what is not to adore in this image of resistance and ascension? What could have come off as a didactic, Russian doll-like stacking of marginalized identities in *Roma Armee* instead allures the audience with an exuberant, biting, seductively queer performative energy that manages to present, honour, and complicate the back- grounds of each cast member. Language alone cannot manifest solidarities, truth, and optimism. The living breathing bodies of *Roma Armee* make patently clear that the non-white and poor people of the global majority are rising up and demanding fair treatment. And while ethnic Roma are often stigmatized as criminals, the idea that their young generations might build an unsanctioned army against majoritarian, straight, white, patriarchal culture – the central focus of *Roma Armee* – is unthinkable for most.



6 Tamara Moyzes, *TV T_ERROR*, 2007, video installation, film still

Why is resistance by ethnic Roma so inconceivable? What prejudices inform this perceived lack of threat to the status quo? Some ten years before *Roma Armee' s*triumph at the Maxim Gorki Theater, Tamara Moyzes's video installation, *TV T_ERROR* (2007), honed in on these questions in a manner antithetical to the joyous yet fierce visual bravado of *Roma Armee*.[17] Decidedly unglamorous and without triumphant catharsis, *TV T_ERROR* introduced fictional narratives of ethnic Roma as suicide bombers taking revenge on Czech society for longstanding discrimination and tyranny, including three videos of different protagonists building bombs. Daringly mimicking Palestinian methods of building bombs in the name of art, Moyzes drew on her experiences of living in Israel during the Second Intifada and her work with the anti-occupation, LGBTQ organization Black Laundry in Israel, which included both Israelis and Palestinians.[18] The related struggles of Roma and Palestinians are not something that *Roma Armee* addresses, but in *TV T_ERROR*, this provocative conflation of both is front and center. In one of the videos, we see artist Věra Duždová, with whom Moyzes collaborated for this piece, seated before a huge Roma flag with two printouts of assault rifles and paper flowers awkwardly attached to it (fig. 6). Bathed in red color from head to toe, wearing a red dress and red paint on her face, she has fake bombs attached to her chest and reads a letter detailing stories of humiliation and violence. The aesthetics of the scene convey the "amateur" style associated with this frightening genre's low budget home-made décor and video equipment; another example of an artwork–like Schmiedt's *Roma Integration* mentioned above–that many curators, especially those working in Western Europe, would rather avoid showcasing.[19]

Although *TV T_ERROR* circulated in the media at the time, neither the Czech public nor the authorities were too concerned.[20] Other parts of the installation clue us in to why there is so little fear of ethnic Roma seeking revenge and/or justice. For example, Romani activist and scholar David Tišer acts as a TV reporter and interviews people on the streets of Prague about their attitudes regarding the discrimination of Roma. During each conversation,

[17] To view videos part of *TV T_ERROR*: Tamara Moyzes's website, available at:http://tamaramoyzes.info/tv_t/letters.html(accessed December 11, 2022).

[18] Author in online correspondence with Tamara Moyzes, December 2, 2022.

[19] Ibid.

[20] The authorities contacted Moyzes by phone, but they dropped the inquiries after they were informed that the fictional videos were part of an artwork. Ibid.

Tišer asks if they think Roma would be capable of becoming suicide bombers. "No," or "I don't know," were the pervasive answers, while some also made sure to add that they think ethnic Roma are "too lazy" to do anything drastic like this. At one point, Tišer comes across a skinhead who openly talks about his hatred for Roma (he derogatorily calls them "gypsies") and remarks that he would like nothing more than to kill them "on sight" if the law didn't prohibit it. Tišer, himself ethnic Roma, remains astonishingly calm and digs deeper. In an unexpected turn, for the interviewer and us viewers, the skinhead discusses how he hates Nazis just as much as Roma and that he doesn't support Hitler or the extermination of Jews, only that of ethnic Roma. And he remains a free man, walking the streets of Prague, who arrogantly adds that if he lived in Brno, he would be killing Roma for a living. As such, *TV T_ERROR* reminds us, time and again, that it is ethnic Roma who are terrorized by the general population, and in danger, even though they themselves are not perceived as a threat.

The refusal to adhere to what Sandra Selimović diagnosed as the "white man's" way of life in *Roma Armee* remains a thorn in the feeble flesh of contemporary nations. And yet, the art of ethnic Roma has always also served as inspiration and a source of ingenuity for those in search of alternatives. The highly venerated, exquisite large-scale cloth paintings by Romani-Polish artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, exhibited at the Polish Pavilion for the 2022 Venice Biennial, astonished with their monumentality and invigorating appropriation of the Renaissance era frescoes found in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, especially its Hall of Months. Framed as "Re-enchanting the World," after Silvia Federici's (2018) work, Mirga-Tas's work highlighted the feminist strength and reproductive labour of community building within her own life and was presented as a "manifesto on Roma identity and art" and a "temporary and chance asylum, offering the viewers hope and respite" (Warsza and Szymański 2022: 14). Images of distinguished figures in the arts who share ethnic Roma origins, such as Tímea Junghaus and Ethel Brooks, as well as Esma Redžepova and Ceija Stojka, were paired with striking scenes of migration and everyday life in Roma communities (fig. 7). While we must remember how easily some of us can fall prey to primitivist impulses to absorb the phantasmagoria of nomadism and nonconformity we glean from "the other," Mirga-Tas's work invites viewers to find refuge and guidance in a different vision of life that celebrates the lives of women of colour and their communities, who have resisted the

"white man's" way of life for centuries. In the face of persistent and cruel segregation and hostility, artists who center ethnic Roma complicate and expand what it might mean to make socially engaged art, with the added–and ceaseless–expectation to repair our divided worlds.



7 Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Re-enchanting the World*, exhibition view, Polish Pavilion at the Biennale Arte, Venice, 2022

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Exhibiting Difficult Women's History: The Latest Project by Andreja Kulunčić

Renata Jambrešić Kirin
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Summary

The paper presents the artistic and research project *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It* (2019–ongoing) by Andreja Kulunčić, one of the most vibrant, internationally distinguished and socially engaged feminist artists in Croatia. The artist focuses on the silence surrounding the erased episode of totalitarian violence against politically active women who did not fit into the binary optics of the Cold War bloc politics between 1948–1956 and who were then imprisoned in the Goli otok and Sveti Grgur political camps located on two islands in the Adriatic Sea. Setting up her own interdisciplinary network of women psychiatrists, scholars and artists, viewing artistic practice as research, a process of cooperation and co-creation, but also as a form of intervention in the politics of memory and memorial gesture, Andreja Kulunčić presented three exhibitions (Pula, 2021; Rijeka, 2022; Manila 2023), several workshops, and a successful media campaign that, in many ways, have demanded an active collaboration on the part of the audience, asking them to "complete" the project. Theoretically, her rhizomatic project ponders upon the transformation of the body subjected to self-colonization to survive in a traumatic environment, and, furthermore, presents methods of activating a symbolic location deprived of modern forms of public acknowledgement.

Keywords: Andreja Kulunčić, art in community, anti-monument, Yugoslav women political prisoners (1948-1953)

About the project[1]

The art project of Andreja Kulunčić *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, which involves activism and research, takes up the theme of the suffering of women inmates on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur islands, of which there is still extremely little discussion. The focus was placed on examining the position of women, who not even today are equally present in historiographical and public discourses about the totalitarian violence and the resistance to it in Yugoslavia at the beginning of the Cold War. The project did not want to favour the hegemonic narrative of communism as totalitarianism and instead aimed to promote a feminist intervention in the difficult heritage that has been erased from the landscape of memory and marginalized by mainstream history. The burden of ideological deadlock must be remembered to create a society that opposes all forms of violence. The artist's idea was to research into and set down women's memories of the traumatic past as a spatial artistic intervention, a Web site, a publication, and a series of workshops and talks accompanying several exhibitions. The scattered female testimonies were given a new dignity and the opportunity to confront a specific space and time of dehumanisation in a new way.

The violent and misogynous bio-politics in the camp for women political prisoners, which deepened the gray zone between the torturer and the victim, resulted in profound traumas and the many years of silence of the women about their Goli Otok experience. The (post)memories of traumatic events live on to mark the lives of the 'generation after', to distance female politicians from the political sphere, and layered on systemic violence against women in the last 1990s war. Queries that appeared during the development of the project, such as, *What to do with the legacy of repressed democracies*? *Whose memory? Which future?*, have addressed a broader issue of the bare life within the Frontex regime of migrant camps in Mediterranean islands. It is no coincidence that the artist, in addition to professional women[2], involved women who are heirs of former political prisoners, carriers of traumatic postmemories that cannot be articulated, assessed, or institutionalised. The curator Irena Bekić highlighted that moment as

[1] This contribution is an updated version of the original text that first appeared in *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, published by MAPA Association and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Dialogue Southeast Europe, Zagreb, 2021.

[2] The project was created in collaboration with anthropologist Renata Jambrešić Kirin and the psychotherapist Dubravka Stijačić, and was organized by the „Ante Zemljar" Goli otok Association and the Association MAPA.

the red thread of the three-decade-long artistic practices of Andreja Kulunčić:

> Working with experts from other domains, often seeking co-authors among the minority groups for whom she is taking up the cudgels, she explores the possibilities of a more just society and communication among the classes, so as to be able to find together with them in a different kind of communication an option for a better life. But she does not adopt a superior or patronising position. Nor does she speak for the disenfranchised, rather, empowers them to speak for themselves and to build a ground from which their voice will be heard in public. This is important to point out, for it is this very relation between the artist and the disempowered subject that is the stumbling block in this kind of art (Bekić 2018: 8).

With the multifaceted project *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It* Kulunčić visibly intervened in the field of cultural memory on controversial moments of the communist ideology of gender equality. Her 'mobile anti-monument' dedicated to the memory of victimised women, female politicians, and intellectuals, was designed as a series of workshops held throughout Croatia. It confirmed the social power of critical contemporary art moving "from representation towards 'relation', 'participation', 'collaborations'" to become "a part of community, patching up social ties, filling the deficiency created by the retreat of the political and the public – which is, however, in the global imperative, exactly what it should be, culture instead of art" (Kobolt and Zdravković 2014: 15). In the post-socialist constellation of institutional forgetfulness, with dark tourism flourishing on Goli otok, "through an exposition of the artistic procedures (…) and the memorial gesture that they constitute" (Bekić 2021: 156), artist's intervention in the politics of empathy, ethics, and recognition is irreplaceable.



Fig. 1: Temporary intervention on Goli otok in which clay figurines made by Andreja Kulunčić merge with the hard surface of the rocks where traces of the camp inmates' work are still visible, 2021. Photo credit: Ivo Martinović.[3]

[3] The authors express their gratitude to Andreja Kulunčić for providing the photos from her documentation.

About the camps for women political prisoners (1948-1953)

The most appropriate description of Goli otok ('Baren Island') and Sveti Grgur ('Saint Gregory') is that they were sites of repressive de-Stalinisation. They were created in 1949, as the Yugoslav Communist Party's answer to the break between Tito and Stalin, with the intention of "re-educating" those members who were politically disloyal or critical. As the Stalinist nature and the vehemence of the repressive activities of the Yugoslav security apparatus against the citizens remained concealed until the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia a few decades later, the meaning of this break had remained ambivalent, denied, or repressed in the common collective consciousness. Tito's "NO" to the 1948 Cominform Resolution was an act of exceptional courage and opposition to Stalin's hegemony, yet it also triggered a campaign of political terror in which the state's secret services broke laws, stripped people of their civil rights and denied the ethical principles of Communist action, which claims to change the society for the better by changing and emancipating the individual. Even seventy years later, there is still no consensus neither on the need to protect Goli otok as a landmark, nor on a memorial gesture to mark the existence of a Communist camp for re-educating dissidents (1949–1956).

Tito's idea that Cominformists[4] should be (psychologically) broken, not killed,[5] opened the path not only for the tried and tested methods of internment in camps but also for the introduction of a series of elements specific to Goli otok, especially when it came to the camps' female inmates. As a penal system aimed to isolate and neutralise political opponents and people with a penchant for taking a critical view of the new authorities, it had some similarities to the Fascist camps on Italian islands, Nazi labour camps, and Stalinist gulags, as well as camps for socially beneficial labour and re-education of the sort we would encounter before and during the Chinese cultural revolution and in other Eastern Bloc countries.[6] Between 1950 and 1956, a political camp was situated

[4] The Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, commonly known as Cominform, was the official central organization of the International Communist Movement from 1947 to 1956. Cominformists, or Ibeovci in the Croatian and Serbian languages, were those who opted for the 1948 Cominform Resolution and its, mostly false, accusations against Josip Broz Tito and the Yugoslav Communist Party.

[5] Tito's motto was "on their heads, but not off with them" (Jezernik 1994: 686).

[6] The concept of corrective labour camps (Gulags) was introduced by the USSR in 1929, with the aid of Stalin's repressive apparatus. The GULAG is an acronym for the Main Directorate of corrective labour camps and colonies (*Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei*),

by turns on the islands of Sveti Grgur and Goli otok ('Worksite V'). Some 860 women were interned there at one time or another, accused of connections to the Cominform in the framework of the "provisional legal framework for penalising and the trial process" (Previšić 2019: 164).[7] The structure of the convicts shows that this was not merely an aping of Stalinist methods and Russian camps for relatives of "traitors of the Homeland"[8] but the punishment, by and large, of politically fully-fledged and self-aware women, chief among whom were the Communists,[9] who believed that they were equal to their (powerful) comrades in their hold on the levers of power.

The female inmates had to build the paths and the many buildings, only traces of which remain today, on their own. With an exceptionally cruel system of punishment, where the inmates were forced to torture each other, the camp was a site of suffering and humiliation. The harassment of the accused women and police surveillance continued even after they had left the camp. On both sites where the women's camps were, there were bunkers and guardhouses with guards, barbed wire fences, worn-out uniforms, hunger and thirst as means of coercion, physical torture and punishment rituals, forced labour, and "re-education" by beatings. While the system of surveillance and organisation had been adopted from the camp systems listed above, while modes of punishment and humiliation were largely borrowed from the long memory of incarceration and subjugation in the Balkans of those who are weaker along gender, class, and ideological lines, political indoctrination was the product of a new era and new means of mass communication. The rituals and cultural practices that were used to shape the collectivist society were merely adapted to camp conditions. The patterns of agitprop culture ("political lessons, reading groups, meetings, dance parties, songs")[10] aimed at

which administered the huge network of camps (labour, convicts' transit, women's children's, "maternal" camps, and camps for criminals and political prisoners).

[7] Based on UDBA records, Martin Previšić shows that "around 550 to 570" passed through both camps, noting that there had never been more than 380 to 400 women inmates there at a single time" (2019: 468).

[8] Such camps were known under the acronym ČSIR - Člyen sem'i izmennika Rodini (Adler 2002).

[9] Kolet Smiljanić, journalist and translator for Radio Belgrade, testified about this: "When the people from UDBA were apprehending me, I told them – I wasn't educated by the street, but by the Party. It taught me all this. It taught me to be honest and to honestly express my opinion" (Simić and Trifunović 1990: 26).

[10] Natalija Petrović's testimony in Simić and Trifunović (1990: 9).

creating a normative Socialist man with the help of self-censorship, self-correction, and the self-regulation of one's physical behaviour and thought, while also at encouraging togetherness and World War II victors' pride. Hard labour in the camps was accompanied by marching to the worksites, the ceaseless chanting of slogans, creating banners, and singing revolutionary songs, all for the collective to become one body, with one heart pledging allegiance to the leader.

If we keep in mind the atmosphere of the affective exaltation of the post-war period, it becomes easier to understand why convict life and forced labour on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur were accompanied by the daily chanting of slogans (*Who isn't with us better not be at all!, We'll kill all dogs who are against the C-P-Y!, For who? For Tito! For the Party! Everyone! Everyone! Everyone!* and so on), the singing of revolutionary songs, writing slogans (women used pieces of glittering calcite to write Tito's name on an elevation), and why only privileged activists and 'brigadists' participated in the folk arts and theatre groups, and saw the occasional film screening. As Natalija Petrović has testified, 'cultural programmes', whose substance boiled down to humiliating and ridiculing the inmates, the constant shouting of slogans and singing stupid songs that even savages would balk at – it all had one sole aim: to physically wear out and morally grind down the convict, until they were willing to state, sign or do anything, really anything, whatever they were asked to. The coexistence of physical and psychological violence as a determinant of camp life is also mentioned by Eva Grlić: "the absolute grinding down of the personality, both physically, by continuous hard labour, abnormal living conditions, and also morally and mentally, through the constant repetition of the statement that all of us who found ourselves here are 'traitors' of the country, the Party, the people, and Tito" (Grlić 1997: 203). Party phantasms about "women's betrayal", about the "crime of separation" from the fatherly figure of the leader were the reason for coming up with the gender-specific forms of maltreatment, verbal abuse, uglifying and shaming.

Along with the harsh weather conditions and the thirst, the incitement to aggression and sadism, and the ruthless violence in which they were forced to take part, have remained longest in the convicts' memories. This was the condition for a newly arrived convict to move from being part of the "mob" (*banda*), an isolated individual exposed to every kind of harassment, to a "reformed" (*brigadirka*), a member of the camp collective, or to a "brigade", where an inmate gained the right to speak, sleep,

maintain hygiene, occasionally contact her family, while still forced to write long reports about her guilt, and, above all, she gained the obligation to beat, humiliate, denounce, and surveil the "boycotted" convicts. Historians have highlighted that, unlike other examples of the coerced cooperation of a smaller (privileged or criminal) segment of the camp population with the administration, the Goli otok system almost completely excluded the guards and the camp administration from the wire-enclosed space of the camp (cf. Banac 1990: 235). Each barrack had its "barrack prefect"[11] in charge of organising a mode of "re-educating the mob", and the nearly nightly rituals of public confessions of one's "sins" towards the Party and/or the new authorities: "I remember, we'd sit in a circle. Outside it's spring, nice weather. Both the mob and the unmob are there, although we are always separated, so that we don't infect them. They guide the women one by one into the centre of the circle, where they have to criticise[12] themselves but also to talk about their most intimate lives, their relationships with their husbands or their boyfriends. This was to be known, because 'the UDBA knew everything'. The aim was as follows: to show that the Cominformist, the enemy, are without exception the worst kind of person, that they are scum, rotten, a disfigured character" (Caca testimony in Simić and Trifunović 1990: 33-34).

A "worksite commander" headed the internal camp administration. She would line up the convicts and count them, hand her reports to the guards, communicate with the camp administration, determine which convicts were to do what kind of work, who would get reduced rations of food and water, who would be sent to solitary confinement, isolation or boycott. Such an introduction of a self-governing technology of punishment, where the victim "collaborates with the oppressors" brought about a "total moral collapse" (Felman 2002: 20) and turned the Goli otok regime into a singular internment camp experiment and an efficient way of striking fear not only into former inmates, but other citizens as well. In the estimations of the convicts themselves, neither the hard labour nor the ideological indoctrination inflicted such grievous psychological effects on their subsequent life as

[11] "Starješina barake" – a masculine noun meaning "elder", a figure of authority – a feminine variant is never used in the camp.

[12] "Raskritikuju" – a non-standard use of the prefix "ras-" that can denote a quality of vehemence, or deconstructiveness.

the "moral corruption" caused by the coercion to inflict pain on other prisoners: "Whoever beat more fiercely, got out more quickly. Those who resisted stayed there longer, but we were all beaten, and we all beat others. We were all reduced to the level of the executioners".[13] The vicious circle of fear and threats, loss of self-respect and empathy, mutual accusations, denunciation, and interrogation, are seen as the moment that prevented the togetherness, solidarity, and mutual support among the convicts that were key to survival in Fascist camps. The Goli otok system was such that an inmate's conditions for release were based on torturing and beating another. This was the reason why many forever kept silent about their experience: "There was not a camp where they sought so hard to humiliate a person, to turn them into a rag, destroy from within and disfigure… You had to leave this place spiritually disabled, disgusted with yourself, ashamed, suffering your entire past life", Novka Vuksanović, a survivor of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, testified.

To women, who had just become equal political citizens in the socialist Yugoslavia, the inmate system established the limits of political action, as blind obedience to the Party leadership, while individual spirit and will, and the critical questioning of the authorities were extinguished. Ceremonial forms of women's degradation[14] were not only an assault on their honour, autonomy, bodily integrity, and self-confidence, but also informed them that they were unworthy of the privileges they had attained by their previous revolutionary or professional engagement. As feminist theory teaches us, when we destroy someone's self-confidence, the process of recovery and rebuilding the person takes a long time. The sources for these "degradation ceremonies" can be found in the Christian ritual of public confession as a public disclosure of one's sins (publicatio sui), in the Soviet practice of Communist (self)criticism and accusatory meetings, in the Chinese Communist struggle sessions,[15] and in the patriarchal education and

[13] Vera Winter. Statement from a video interview made on 25 August 2013 as part of the Personal Memories project by Documenta – Centre for Dealing with the Past (http://www.osobnasjecanja.hr/).

[14] The term, "degradation ceremony", was defined by sociologist Harold Garfinkel in a 1956 study as an act of public communication whose aim is to denounce an individual as unworthy of the privileges of their erstwhile role in the society or an institution. They were most effective in societies that were not "entirely demoralised or disorientated."

[15] Cf. Michel Foucault (1997: 244) and Hannah Arendt (1976: 353).

socialisation of women as less worthy members of society. Women were shamed by members of a patriarchal family from their earliest years for any action or feeling that diverged from the norm, hence interiorizing the feelings of blame and shame that will haunt them for decades. This was precisely the matrix on which the camp's destructive and misogynistic biopolitics was built, systematically attacking the convicts' moral and physical integrity, as well as their reproductive health, while at the same time banishing their sexual specificities, forcing the inmates to punish each other and destroy the women's network of support. This resulted in deep traumas and long-lasting silence among women about their experience of Goli otok.



Fig. 2: Andreja Kulunčić, *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, view of the video installation, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka, 2022. Photo credit: Ivo Martinović.

Did women suffer more and longer?

Tortured, humiliated, and intimidated, the former inmates of Sveti Grgur and Goli otok kept silent for decades. Their stories only began to seep into the public domain in 1990, when socialism had already begun to cave in, as these stories fit the anti-Communist narrative of the period. A documentary series called *Goli Život – Naked Life* – was broadcast after the death of writer Danilo Kiš in 1990, the year Dragoslav Simić and Boško Trifunović published the testimonies of the convicts and an interrogator in their book, *Women's Camp on Goli otok*. At Kiš's urging, Ženi Lebl wrote down and published her testimonies, and a little later, the Zagreb publisher Durieux published Eva Grlić's memories. Rosa Dragović-Gašpar, Vera Cenić and Milka

Žicina also published their memories, while in recent years several documentaries were filmed about Eva Panić Nahir, and the Montenegrin intellectual Đina Markuš,[16] the author of an unpublished manuscript. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote that in many aspects, women's gulags were worse than men's, which was confirmed by Dragan Marković (1990) and Giacomo Scotti (2002) based on their examinations of the testimonies about Goli otok. Marković concludes that men were punished more severely, but women found it more difficult to cope with the consequences of the "re-education" and found it much harder to bring their experiences out into the open. The fear, lack of trust in their capabilities, apathy, insecurity, and moral confusion that most of the female convicts took with them from the island prevented them from reintegrating into public and political life even if they had the chance to do so. Unlike the men, who gradually won the right to speak publicly about Goli otok in the late 1960s, through books of testimonies, fictionalised memoirs, novels, plays, and films, women suffered multiple levels of stigmatisation and were precluded from public engagement.

This deeper repression of personal and political trauma was also a product of the fact that due to their socialisation, women were more inclined to assume a feeling of guilt and inferiority, not only due to the torture suffered, but also the moral betrayal of humane principles; that they felt guilt over the suffering of their children and other family members; that they found it more difficult to return to the public sphere and recreate erstwhile social support networks; that they more rarely got jobs that suited their professional abilities and ambitions. Unlike male memoirists, the former female convicts were more willing to admit that "none were innocent, we were all both victims and executioners of Tito's and Stalin's army alike" (Dragović-Gašpar 1990: 251) and accept their share of the historic responsibility for the betrayed Communist utopia of a new socialist Man "with a human face". As witnesses, they more frequently questioned the ethical line between bravery and "fanaticism", personal integrity, and the drive for survival, sought historical analogies and literary images

[16] The art documentary "Šagargur", based on Markuš' memoir, was a project that author Nataša Nelević had been working on for several years. In 2023, production companies "Live Production" and "Rezon Incubator" finally brought the movie to life. The digital Montenegrin Women's Museum, also initiated by Nelević, showcased the stories of Montenegrin female prisoners from Goli otok to a wider audience. (https://www.muzejzena.me/).

to better reveal the state of the "pre-political animal" which they had been reduced to.[17]

The fates of the female political convicts this project presents show that the state's repressive policies focussed precisely on educated, ambitious, and competent women and professionals among the Communist ranks who competed with their comrades for positions in the media, the social services, and the administrative apparatus. Among male convicts, factory workers, clerks, and farmers outnumbered the rest, while "women political criminals" largely consisted of intellectuals and students, journalists, translators from Russian, as well as office workers who had graduated from secondary school (cf. Jandrić 1993:183-202). The figure of up to seven percent of political convicts being women is correlated with the fact that in Socialist Yugoslavia, women Communists rarely held more than five to seven percent of the positions in the highest echelons of the executive branch.[18] It was the women antifascist fighters who won women the right to vote, the right to inherit property, and obtain pay equity with men; however, the discrepancy between the declared and the real was large.

The pre-war revolutionaries and Communists[19] felt the injustice particularly strongly, as instead of playing prominent roles in social and political life, they had to struggle on in deep anonymity for the next fifty years. Thus, the Party sent a clear message that combativeness, autonomy and not respecting directives were undesirable, while loyalty and subordination were the desirable characteristics of female comrades. The ethnologist Miroslava Malešević commented on this paternalistic and instrumentalist behaviour of former comrades, who concentrated on consolidating power: "Having fulfilled the task enforced by extraordinary circumstances, a former partisan woman and shock worker would (…) withdraw from the social scene as quickly as she emerged on it. Energetic

[17] "I'm not a hero, I'm not a heroine, I'm a rabbit, I'm scared. I won't tell, I won't confess, I can take the beating, but I'm shaking". Jelka Zrnić's statement in Simić and Trifunović (1990: 155).

[18] The historian Sabrina P. Ramet cites the fact that in 1948, women Communist made up 20% of the members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but just 9.7% of the membership represented at the 5th Congress of the CPY held that year, while only three women (4.8%) were involved in the work of the Central Committee of the CPY (Ramet 1999: 99).

[19] The women in question were Adela Bohunicki, Jelena Hadžikan, Branislava Marković, Kristina Kusovac, Dragica Srzentić, Simka Stanković and others.

breakthroughs into all professions, including the highest levels of government, were quickly halted" (Malešević 1988). Evidence of the downplaying of women's (revolutionary and leftist) history lies in the fact that socialist Yugoslavia never established a research institution, archive, or museum dedicated to its world-famous women partisans and revolutionaries, among them ninety-one war heroines recognised as National Heroes, the most distinguished decoration in the country. The long-term consequences of political terror on women's emancipation and social mobility should be sought precisely in these secret police procedures of the moral condemnation of women's private lives, characters, mobility, and achievements that suggested to women citizens that the primary context of their self-realisation was the home, the work collective and social (volunteer) work. The disbanding of the Women's Antifascist Association (AFŽ) in 1953, with the justification that its political and cultural capital had been depleted, was an integral element of the change of direction in solving the "women question"; the term "afežejka" began to be used as a slur for women who claimed a right to decisively speak out in public.

Why do we return to women who disappeared in the crush of political violence?

We do not return to the women who perished or disappeared as public figures to deepen family, social, or political traumas, but for precisely the opposite reason: to untie the knots of pain and traumatic injuries that are transmitted across generations, leaving (in)visible traces on the biographies of the inmates' descendants. The second impetus comes from the awareness that the struggle for human and women's rights is never finished, and that to strengthen our potential for that struggle, we need knowledge of women's history, especially of those women who suffered for the "political offense" of free thinking and expressing critical views. All the police files, interviews, written memories, and other ego-documents, as well as the memories of the female descendants of the women from Goli otok that we collected in the framework of the *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It* project will help us to comprehend the place of women in episodes of political terror, but also to single out what is empowering and positive about these testimonies, what restores belief in humanist values, in freedom of choice and moral action. The interest in

the "banality of goodness"[20], for the convicts' efforts to maintain minimal, ostensible normalcy in the world of the camp, is precisely what stands out concerning regular scholarly interest in the consequences of dehumanisation, measured by the loss of typically masculine values – honour, bravery, and principle. What lies at the centre of all the efforts to survive in extreme conditions is what we often stereotypically call "female values" – resilience, compassion, the need to confide, and to help the weakest. These are also values that can help us today to co-create a better society based on a democratic, plural, gender-sensitive culture of memory. We also want to change the cultural practice within which women's testimonies about significant episodes in history only become the focus of public attention solely by interest on the part of male intellectuals or through works of great literary figures such as Danilo Kiš or David Grossman.[21]

Traumatic stories are not a good source of knowledge about the nature of human relations, but they can give us precious insights into the strength of the human spirit, the capacity for self-healing, and the ability to change oneself. Thus Yevgenia S. Ginzburg, who spent twenty years in the Siberian Gulag, and Rosa Dragović-Gašpar, a long-term prisoner of Sveti Grgur, Goli otok, Stolac and Bileća, speak of how after the camp, their humanistic views became deeper, and they freed themselves of the blind faith in the dogmatic principles of the Communist ideology. However, much like many other former political prisoners, they never ceased to believe in the ideals of a just, egalitarian, democratic society based on humanist principles. Facing the new social challenges of a state of emergency caused by the pandemic, we become more aware that setting a high bar of humanist ideals in a community is always in correlation to the numerous threats of denial and betrayal.

[20] With the concept of the "banality of goodness", specific to the moral conduct of rescuers and other ordinary people who oppose evil in extreme historical situations, Tzvetan Todorov played on Hannah Arendt's searing 'banality of evil' (Todorov 1999). For examples of the moral conduct of former female political prisoners in socialist Yugoslavia, see Jambrešić Kirin (2014: 36-51).

[21] One of Danilo Kiš's interlocutors in the documentary series *Goli život* (1990), Eva Nahir Panić, told Israeli novelist David Grossman her life story, based on which he wrote an exceptional novel in the genre of testimonial literature – *More Than I Love My Life* (2021).



Fig. 3: Andreja Kulunčić, *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, exhibition view, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka, 2022. Photo credit: Ivo Martinović.



Fig. 4: Andreja Kulunčić, *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, exhibition view, Vargas Museum, Manila, 2023. Photo credit: Vargas Museum.

Artistic restoration as a mode of rethinking traumatic identities

In 2021, Andreja Kulunčić invited me as curator[22] to be part of her research project; it was a challenge I received with a lot of care and implication, especially because in view of the recent developments in the history of mentalities and the constant paradigm shifts, the exploration of humanity's recent past is a

[22] I previously collaborated with Andreja Kulunčić for the project *South by Southeast*, co-curated with Patrick Flores at the Osage Foundation in Hong Kong, in 2015.

matter not only for academic research or philosophic endeavour, but a socio-political responsibility that should be exercised with diligence and updated instruments. The restoration of our past delivers new modes of reading and translating suspended events, personal histories or contingent realities.

Each process of restoration begins with the identification of the object to be restored, followed by the analysis of its current state, and the acknowledgement of its representativity within a specific context. It is a somatic procedure as much as it is a psychological, involving as it does certain skills that have to be combined with vision and gentleness. The creation of meaning through restoration requires an astute sense of time, space and context, but also the capacity to deliver a form able to communicate outside a constructed frame.

In 2019, when Andreja Kulunčić started to look into the internal mechanisms and the apparatus of constraint behind the oppression of women on the islands of Goli and Sveti Grgur, she initiated a complex process of historical restoration, involving several levels of artistic and social practices – site visits, collaborations with Renata Jambrešić Kirin and the psychotherapist Dubravka Stijačić, interviews with the female descendants of a few of the women imprisoned on the two islands, and the production of a series of art works, interventions and workshops that were translations of actions and states of mind specific to life in the internment camp. In her past practice, Kulunčić has often transgressed the limits of visual arts to question historical and sociological landmarks. Her inquisitive practice allowed her to become relevant outside the artistic realm, conjuring methods of work used in anthropological or social analysis.



Fig. 5 The workshop *850 Women for 850 Women*, part of the exhibition *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka, 2022. Photo credit: Ivo Martinović.



Fig 6. The workshop *850 Women for 850 Women*, part of the exhibition *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, at the Vargas Museum, Manila, 2023. Photo credit: Jerael Alpino, Francesca Lalunio, Marga Manalastas, Melissa Uy.

You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It is a rhizomatic project that aims to ponder upon the transformation of the body subjected to self-colonization in order to survive in a traumatic environment, and, furthermore, to present methods of activating a symbolic location deprived of modern forms of public acknowledgement.

Survival on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur was partly possible because the women had to conquer the space with their own bodies – the body took over the soul denying any trace of sensitivity, warmness and not lastly, femininity. The interned women had to objectify their own existence for the purpose of facing torture and humiliation. At the same time, they were subjected to a double form of exclusion – one by the state that was supposed to protect them, and one by the fellow-prisoners who should have provided support and solidarity – and a double form of confinement – one coming from the camp, and another one coming from their own bodies.

The *body of the oppressed* is a carcass, limited and emptied of fluids due to the hard labour, left bare of dreams or hopes – it revolves around impossibility and rejection. Unable to distinguish between outside and inside, the body of the oppressed faces abjection. In the study *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva analyses "the abjection of the self," which occurs "when the subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that is none other than the abject" (Kristeva 1982: 5). Deprived from the day-body, the night-body, the body of the mother, and the body of the caregiver, the *body of the oppressed* finds

balance in becoming the *body of the oppressor*, as an effect of the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other, as Kristeva explains. Abjection is generated by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Ibid., 4) and in this constellation we can include the system of the camp (Kristeva mentions in this category the crimes of Auschwitz).

At the outset of the project *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It*, Andreja Kulunčić visited the sites where the barracks housing the female inmates on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur were located. The artist mapped the territory, trying to understand what the everyday life of the interned women looked like; the remains didn't communicate about the architecture of the place or the rhythm of the compound, so the reconstitution of *life in the camp* would have been impossible. Consequently, the act of restoring and retracing *life in the camp* became a cultural construction that was enveloped in the form of six videos sublimating the conditions in which the women were working. Together with Kulunčić, vocalist Annette Giesrieg, saxophonist Jasna Jovićević and dancer Zrinka Užbinec conceived a series of movements and sounds, catalysts of the tensed bodies bearing the weight of the stones they were forced to transport or of the screaming which was part of the intimidating punishment rituals. The videos were first presented at the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria in Pula (2021), under the curation of Irena Bekić, and later at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka (2022) and the Vargas Museum in Manila (2023).

Female Figurines: The Formation of an An Anti-Monument

Through engagement and the propensity for nurturing, Andreja Kulunčić attempted to reverse the ritual of punishment and oppression – in the summer of 2021, the artist travelled to Goli otok where she used stones as plinths for modelling a series of clay figurines, each dedicated to one of the women confined on the island. The figurines placed on the burning hot stones in reclining or sitting positions, sometimes identifying themselves with the rocks, act as reminders of the hidden and untold narratives of the islands. Never displayed in groups, always solitary, the figurines are simulacra of the division between, as Judith Butler once mentioned, "the inner and outer worlds of the subject" as a consequence of "a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control" (Butler 1999: 184).

The constricted clay shapes introduce the meditation around the soul of the punished; in the opinion of Butler, who also quotes Michel Foucault, "the effect of a structuring inner space is produced through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure. The soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. The lack which is the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show" (Ibid.). The figurines are the representations of the prisoners' souls, born as part of a creative and restorative ritual outside the social or artistic norms, unconditionally present while they invoke an accumulation of absences, together with the acknowledgement of solidarity, another condition of survival.

This temporary action was the first step for the creation of 850 figurines, encompassing the approximate official number of female prisoners committed to the islands of Goli otok and Sveti Grgur, which Kulunčić started to produce in 2022 through a series of collaborative workshops, dedicated solely to women, that firstly took place at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka in the frames of her personal exhibition, curated by Irena Bekić together with myself, and that was expanded to various locations in Croatia, and later at the Vargas Museum in Manila in 2023. The experience in Manila brought another layer to the development of the project, as at that time, the focus was on other histories of repression and exclusion specific to Southeastern Asia.



Fig. 7: Documentation of the terracotta figurines produced during the workshops taking place in Croatia throughout 2022. Photo credit: Sanja Bistričić Srića.



Fig. 8: Documentation of the terracotta figurines produced during the workshops taking place at the Vargas Museum in Manila, 2023. Photo credit: Jerael Alpino, Francesca Lalunio, Marga Manalastas, Melissa Uy.

For Andreja Kulunčić, the process of producing the 850 figurines together with different women in the various institutions where the project will unfold over the course of a prolonged period of time, goes beyond the ritualistic force of such a self-regulatory approach. In its essence, it is a critical and cogent gesture motivated by the contradictory existential threads typical for internment camps – solidarity is counterpoised by aggression against each other, just as trust is neutralized by deceit combined with fear. The figurines inform of the apparition of the *meta-body* or the *body of the survivor* congruent with the function of the *anti-monument*, evoking a perpetual system of inquiry over the self and the limitations of the self. The anti-monument is as well an object of contradiction that involves the disembodiment of a perceivable, historically identifiable reality and its transgression to a state of vulnerability, whereas the agency of the subject is never surrendered.

On Goli otok and Sveti Grgur, time was measured through the repetitive, Sisyphean action of carrying stones up the slope and then carrying them back or releasing them downhill. As Eva Nahir Panić mentioned, most of the women isolated on the two pieces of land didn't have the strength to perform physical work as they had never used their hands in such a manner. Therefore, the forced labour the inmates were executing was a way of transforming the *working body* into a *political body*, exhausted of any form of agency

and unable to exercise the habitual conduct of their daily lives. The vulnerable women were pushed into an activity directed to delineating the boundaries of their bodies, as limitations, social symbols and structural or marginal human experiences are the ones that progress toward *pollution*, as described back in the 1960s by the social anthropologist Mary Douglas. The pollution powers "inhere in the structure of ideas itself and punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined" (Douglas 2002: 169).

Drawn by the epistemic force of the two islands, Andreja Kulunčić shifted her attention to the rock formations characteristic of the area and more recently to the plants that live on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur. Departing from the image of the silent bodies that were once engaged in moving the stones on the slippery slopes, the artist worked closely with the daughters, granddaughters, and nieces of some of the women prisoners in order to mark the presence of their ancestors on the islands. The marking was realized by way of artistic interventions that happened in 2020, or in 2021, when two separate statements were carved into stone, one belonging to Vera Winter, and one to Ženi Lebl.

The two assertions – *We carried the stone from the sea to the top of the hill. When the pile at the top was big enough, we would take the stone back to the sea* and *It was on your shoulder, Sveti Grgur, that the classical question to Be(at) or not to Be(at) started. If you beat, you will be. If you don't beat, you'll be beaten.* – were initially handwritten by their heirs, Nina Winter and Ana Lebl, and afterwards, their handwriting was transferred to stone through carving. The statements have the intention of creating significance around the identity of a group of women historically meant to signify nothing. Kulunčić uses a complex methodology enveloping archival research, content analysis and artistic investigation in an attempt to generate the leap from the political to the *cultural body*. The inscribed stones are not specifically signalled; they are left as witnesses of the inner worlds of the prisoners, compressed between layers of remembrance and bodily impermanence. For the passers-by, the engraved rocks might seem direct expressions of the women once inhabiting the islands, not linked to a specific chronology, but accurately localized in what is becoming a site of memory.

When in 2020 Andreja Kulunčić installed the simulacrum of a commemorative metal plate on one of the outer walls of a barrack

belonging to the women prison on Goli otok, another fold of the project was revealed. The plate as object, alongside the inscribed text, signifies the identification of the locus with a site of historical and cultural importance, bringing up the possibility of opening it for another type of audience and for a conditional interpretation of the symbolism behind the objectification of the island, while introducing the perspective of "the other."

By appropriating the role of a decision maker in front of an indifferent political regime, Kulunčić reinstates a necessary order of things, one that was missing after the closure of the prisons, almost as if the installation of the plate, a gesture of normality and responsibility in any democracy, generates an alternative identity for the empty islands.

In the case of Goli otok and Sveti Grgur, the abandonment of the women's detention camps after the fall of communism without any exercise of social, political and cultural responsibility, begot the image of the camp as a structure of power that can be perpetuated and reproduced. As Agamben asserted, "The camp is the paradigm itself of political space at the point in which politics becomes biopolitics and the *homo sacer* becomes indistinguishable from the citizen" (Agamben 2000: 41). The prisoners on the islands of Goli and Sveti Grgur had to exert their political bodies in order to survive – they had to punish and beat one another, repress others to escape repression. Again, the invisible, yet sovereign state, allowed such horrendous phenomena to happen. Having this in mind, the presence of the plate shouldn't be interpreted as commemorative or even as a warning; it is a signifier of the consequences of a prolonged state of exception.

You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It inherently creates a bridge between a disturbing event from the past and the internalized way of re-writing our recent history. Over the past three years, Andreja Kulunčić has revealed a normative social reality in which the state, the camp, and the bearers of history have been playing a game of hide-and-seek that exceeds the boundaries of a certain territory or theoretical path and can be attributed to the very condition of an oblivious humanity.

Concluding Remarks: New Traces and Sequals

After the project *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It* was presented in an exhibition format at the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria in Pula in 2021, in the following year it was exhibited at the Museum of Modern and

Contemporary Art in Rijeka, this time comprising a multitude of directions that have been followed by the artist throughout the duration of her research. Apart from the performative videos which highlight the transdisciplinary approach of the artist, Andreja Kulunčić displayed preparatory drawings, the original writings of the heirs of the female prisoners, and series of images describing her actions on the islands, together with a mind map informing the process behind the construction of her ideas. An innovative element was the transformation of one museum-room into an active discussion space dedicated to meetings, theoretical reading sessions, and the workshops where women would model the clay figurines that would later be part of the collective anti-monument dedicated to the female inmates on Goli otok and Sveti Grgur.

At the beginning of 2023, at the Vargas Museum in Manila, apart from the fundamental thematic lines, the exhibition also addressed the postcolonial context in the Philippines through the format of engaged workshops involving museum curators, professors, students, and persons who had experienced histories of repression.

The development of the project *You Betrayed the Party Just When You Should Have Helped It* informs upon the new paradigm in matters of organizing art projects that are not solely bound to an impersonal display of artifacts, but rather to an engaged and time-invested research, expanding over related fields (i.e., anthropology, history, psychology).

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An *Image of Existence* between Total Violence and Total Value

Transcript of the dialogue between the feminist course participants and Denise Ferreira da Silva

The discussion was preceded by the screening of film *4 Waters – Deep Implicancy* (2018) by Denise Ferreira da Silva and Arjuna Neuman. The talk took place online on 26 May 2021, as a part of the course *Beyond the Ruins of Capitalism. Stolen Concepts, Deep Silences, Resurfaced Frictions,* and was moderated by Silvana Carotenuto from University L'Orientale, Naples.

ALEX HENNING

What I found interesting in the film, also in relation to the lecture, was the relationship between the visible and the invisible, that which is seen, and that which is not seen. You raised the point about surveillance; I was wondering if you can expand on that in relation to the film or in a larger framework.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Thank you for the invitation to be part of this conversation, and thanks, Silvana, for that embarrassingly amazing introduction. It was to hear you and to be in conversation with you, even though I was silent. It was an interesting exercise, and I'm very appreciative of that.

So, Alex, you're asking about surveillance in general, and why we have that in the film *4 Waters.* I was watching it again with you now; I don't normally watch it again, but this time I did. There are so many layers in that film, and there are so many reasons why Arjuna Neuman and I touched on same things; watching it now, and then your question and the general comment, just reminded me how the ways policing and surveillance are in *Serpent Rain* in the form of police brutality, and in *4 Waters* because of the European Border Management Frontex, I mean, the whole setup of the apparatus of border management during 2014/15 in response to the refugee crisis. They are there because of the commentary on the crisis in the Mediterranean Sea, but there are also there because one of the themes in *4 Waters* is black light. That is a critique, a critique of enlightenment, a critique of visibility, visibility both regarding knowledge and also highlighting its role in policing, in surveillance. That is in the film, and that's why we have purple over the place. The film is also about the limit; it is not so much the limits of visibility, but also the question of knowledge, that is also included, and which is beyond the visible spectrum, from UV to ultra-red light. In *4 Waters* we are working with UV light, UV frequencies, and then, now in the next film, which is ready, *Sooth Breath*, we are working with the Ultra Red to talk more about heat, it's more on heat. So, those are the two registers: on the one hand, association and connection of white light, enlightenment, modern philosophy, and violence; on the other hand, the 'what', the question. I think it is rather political.

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

It's also related to the question of total violence, somehow. Maybe that's because it's so at the origin of modernity, and I was not able to explain it because that was a whole world to express. Tell us a bit more about this total violence that also somehow brings you to total reclaim...

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Yes, total violence; this is where Derrida is very important, and it is Derrida reading Benjamin and Levinas. In *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, I focused on what Levinas calls "The Small o Other", the violence of representation, and then I just pushed that critique to the critique of the whole of modern philosophy. At the same time, as I was attending to the critique of the representation, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* begins with the scene of killing, it begins with

the killing of Amadou Diallo by the cops in New York. So it begins with total violence, but it deals primarily with the role that representation plays in justifying that violence. And then, later, it has been developing – what interests me, primarily, is the possibility for that total violence, for it to take place without unleashing an ethical crisis. Why? The total violence of killing, which Levinas connects to "the Big O Other", "the Big O Other" that's the one that can be killed, that's the face that cannot be. So, on the one hand, there is the focus on total violence, and, on the other hand, which I've been thinking about more lately, it is the possibility of something I call total value. I mean, I'm playing with excess and pushing the meanings to the limits. Right, for instance, if value is fundamentally different, that is no such a thing as total value. But if we think beyond that grammar, that makes sense precisely through the universal measures that allow you to compare, you know, value, for instance, there is then the possibility of thinking in a way that one attributes value to everything and anything, right? But that value is no longer given by difference; I don't know, maybe, it's given by existence. So, the total value that cannot be monetized, the total value that has to be returned as a demand, as an obligation, whatever we call it, but it will always never be returned because it can't return that which has been killed because that's already recomposed. So, to me, that is this horizon of justice. So total violence and total value as a way of pushing beyond the meaning of each term, a way of making, at least, making it possible to imagine. To imagine, maybe, to speak about, as I'm trying to do now, justice also out and beyond the confines of modern thinking, whatever it becomes. Because then I go back to Derrida, to his statement "if such a thing exists". But because it doesn't become, it won't become, then it has to be brought here, right in this moment. And allow and justify any kind of fundamental transformation precisely because it is impossible to bring back that which was killed so as we can live in the ways we do now.

EMANUELA MALTESE

My question is about quantum physics, because implicancy is working in quantum physics. I noticed that lately there is a wide engagement with quantum physics in social sciences, and not only in social sciences, I'm thinking also, for example, black quantum afrofuturism, or even in voodoo in Alphatronic spiritualities. I'm a scholar in Alphatronic spiritualities, and I have just read a wonderful book on the vodou quantum leap. And so,

I was thinking if this could be a move for the bridging the gap between humanities and science, which has been, of course, the great separation preventing certain, I don't want to use alternative knowledge because if I say alternative knowledge, it presupposes, again, a limit. But, I mean, it helps at least to know the word differently (…) And, here again, the only reply I have is art. Art has already engaged within this implicancy, with quantum physics, and it has done that already for long; it's already 30 or 40 years that art is doing this. And yes, my question is about that. And, of course, it's a tremendously beautiful movie.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Thank you for what you say about the film. So, yes, well, philosophers and then social scientists have been engaging with quantum physics, relativity, which is still classical physics, and quantum physics for a while. So, Whitehead, process philosopher, is totally engaging with quantum physics; whatever we think of it, it's still already there. So if we read Deleuze, it is already quantum physics, even though it's not explicit, and so with Foucault, etc. We have been doing that, and I think it's been generative and then, at the same time, it's being limited and limiting because in a way, quantum physics also remains within the limits of modern thinking. It doesn't ask you to go anywhere, right? The very notion, the very term 'entanglement' already presupposes that separability. And then when they find the particles, the solutions to position and momentum, they're like, "oh, wow, it's weird". It is weird because the measure, the measurement, is Newtonian, right? So, there is a way that the practice of the science itself, in itself, cannot help much because it's not going beyond; there is also the fact that physicists, in general, can't go beyond. In general, I mean, except Karen Barad, but then, Karen is a theorist, they don't even ask the questions, because they are so specialised in the little part of particle physics they do. And then, when you ask the general questions of philosophy, they go like, you know, "why are you interested in that?". Thus, there is a need for movement on that side. In my view, what I think, and I highlight it, to me it's weird because it becomes more like a metaphysical thing. It's not about how or what physics has to teach, what quantum physics can teach us, about how to think about the social world, but it's due to their failures, due to the fact that the Newtonian tools, both the mathematical ones and the technology, are so limited. What they're allowing us to see is that there is so much that is incomprehensible and that will remain

incomprehensible, that should remain incomprehensible, that feeds back to us in terms of actually opening up the possibility for another way, I call it 'image of existence', and I use the plenum, and, more and more, now 'corpus infinitum' as this image. An 'image of existence', an image that precedes, you know, how we go about doing anything. So, if the image we have, that we have with modern concepts and categories, it is the image of an order, right? The cosmos as ordered, the idea of the universalist order that preceded modern thinking has shifted, but it remains there. And particle physics and quantum field theory and loop theory, all those theories give this image of something else, something else that approaches, like you were talking about African philosophy and cosmology. As a late 'boomer generation' person, I encountered quantum physics back in the 80s. Like this damn thing, that's how I encountered it. And then, when I was in college, we decided to do a quantum physics reading group, study group, because we were also then Buddhists, and all those interesting things we did in the 80s, and many of us still do. So, to me, it is through the shift at the level of the imagination, which I think that – if, you know, the more we experiment with that, I think, the more there will be the possibilities of finding different ways of describing existence and then, also making sense of things that will be then, I think, less violent. Anyway, I'm taking too long to answer.

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

I know Lada wants to intervene, but I would love to leave some space for Emanuela. She is writing her second PhD on James Baldwin, and, of course, she had the experience of the translation of *The Undercommons* by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. I know that Emanuela's heart is with spirituality, something that, somehow, is along the side of the spirit. And she is also interested in the secret and the possibility of entering the space of voodoo, or whatever. You're also quite aware that space is a space of something that should also make sense for an opening up of this kind of dialectics between materiality and reality, science and religion.

EMANUELA MALTESE

My question is about quantum physics, because implicancy is working in quantum physics. I noticed that lately there has been a wide engagement with quantum physics in social sciences and not only within social sciences; I'm thinking, for example, of black quantum afrofuturism, or, even, voodoo in Alphatronic spiritualities.

I wonder if this could be a move for the bridging between humanities and science, which has been, of course, the great separation. I mean if it helps to know the word differently. Do you think that this move can be influential? What is its scale? We must consider that we are talking of secret knowledge, difficult knowledge. Who can engage with this knowledge? Is it accessible for everybody? Here the only reply I have is art: art has already engaged with implicancy or quantum physics, and it has done it for at least the last 30 or 40 years. And, of course, your movie is a tremendously beautiful work.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Well, these questions are worthy for several reasons. One of them is because we already come with this distinction, this fundamental differentiation between the spiritual and the material, not the material as matter but the material as also already informed by a notion of form and efficacy. So, the material as the scientific, like, you know, Marx and historical materialism, right, the materialism of the thing of the social. And that is already involved and, when it's presented, it already also involves the distinction between European knowledges, whatever, and conceptions of existence and everybody else. That is also a hierarchy in that distinction. That makes it difficult, no matter how you present it, it's almost impossible that distinction is not read in this material, proper rational material *versus* the spiritual and the others, whatever. So, what I am interested in, because I have my frame for this reading, which I'm calling elemental, because the elements give nice correspondences, my frame for this reading is, you know, I can call it Aristotle's "four causes". But I am interested in breaking the substance, because the substance is the form and the material cause. And if you end in modern philosophy, there is a way of reading the last four hundred some years, maybe five hundred some years, in which you see philosophers taking one of these causes to give that inflection to modern thinking. But no one dares take the material, take matter, because matter is precisely that which you know is or can only become through something else, spiritual, or formal, or efficient causes. And so, in terms of the image of the world, one of the main shifts that the failures of particle physics indicate, is that matter escapes the formal and the efficient and the final, which is associated with the spiritual. And what I'm interested in is the collapsing of the other three into matter. And the distinction of these causes, because what we call "spiritual" as or "material", as if it is something separate, one

could say that's probably just one way of answering the question of how, or what. What makes it happen now, right, is the spiritual form, or the material or the material element, or how it happens. And we have at least four ways, always four ways, probably more, but at least four ways of answering the question, and the spiritual, the final, the why we are here – that why that goes beyond what we call physical material – is an answer. It's just an answer to a particular way of asking about existence, and I want to collapse them down to, you know…

LADA ČALE FELDMAN

Thank you very much for the film, of course. We started by discussing what's visible and what is invisible; Alex started by this concentration on the visual aspect of the film, and I just wanted to say that I was very much disturbed by the sonoric aspect of the film. And I was wondering, since you were talking about the violence of representation, and knowing to what extent even the very word 'theory' relates to visuality, I just wondered how the soundtrack of the film was created, talking of disorientation in time and space, the sonoric aspect, the cries of people, the words spoken, the waves, and, of course, the instruments – that was something that, for me, cut through the images in a very disturbing way.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Yes, that's something we do in *4 Waters and* we did in *Serpent Rain*. It is all that you mentioned, but it is also, and Arjuna is better than me to talk about that, per acoustics which is a technique, a sound technique that works in your belly rather than in your ear. I always forget what it is; but it is clear to the person who did the sound for us in *Serpent Rain,* and, now – in all the three films, precisely because one of the concerns is that, if the films bring a critique of time, *Serpent Rain* does it more explicitly. Then, in *4 Waters*, there is the critique of white light, of visibility. Yet it is a film, so it is in time, which has a length, and we use the images. The way of destabilising is precisely by bringing this other element, which is the sound that works in your body. In the exhibitions, the installations for both *Serpent Rain* and *4 Waters*, we have four speakers; two speakers that have been found and that work here in your back, and they are behind you, in your belly, behind you. Then, physicality is even more explicit. Anyway, it's not so much the actual songs, the material, but it is how that the sound is presented and distributed. It is our way of undermining our medium.

LADA ČALE FELDMAN

That's precisely what I was interested in.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

And living with that; because it's also important not to give up, and then, at the same time, not to think that it's possible to convey anything without ambiguity and without limitation. Because I think that's the other element in the way we think, that is problematic. I think that it goes, indirectly, and very far away, Emanuela, back to spirituality. I think of the question of spirituality that is something about authenticity, namely, all those purities of authenticity, all these things that are so crucial in establishing units, in preparing units, and then actually, also, in creating and developing them, you know, as totalities. I know that is a bit cryptic, but I think it's related to that problem, with spirituality.

BILJANA KAŠIĆ

I really lost some of my words because I'm overwhelmed by intense emotions around these films. Thank you, really, Denise. I am still thinking of what Silvana was saying about your theoretical work and what you offered to us. My question is whether it's possible to compare the total violence with the universality in terms of modern society, in terms of colonial society, or (neo) imperialism, so, all these social systems and their intentions about universality and totality. In addition, I also found a kind of relational linkage between necropolitics as an economic condition in capitalism and production of this kind of dead zones using a refugee as a human creature and medium. So, relating to this my question to you, how you can define this type of epistemology because what I found here is anew aesthetics of epistemology that you offered to us through this film. I do think that is something beyond epistemology. Is it possible?

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

I don't know; it's something else, certainly. I keep saying that it's about the 'how' but it's not necessarily a methodology. It's about the image, that is, the how in terms of the critical. That is a critical movement, and that is beyond the critical movement, as the one I was highlighting in the book *Unpayable Debt*, this book that is coming out this year, I called that movement *negativation*, and I parade it with the dialectic. One of the meanings of negativation is *refusal*. So, I was thinking, how do you think in a way that,

instead of having one and two standing in front of each other in that engagement, you either use this movement of going away or the movement of real destruction of the conditions of possibility for that? I'm using refusal to mean both. That's a name for both, the gesture, and then, also, it is a fact, right? But that doesn't quite capture. That is, more than that, because that is also the image, the image *of existence* that is always there, as we engage. An image that precedes, you know how we go about doing something. So, if the image we have, we have it with modern concepts and categories, so it is the image of an order, right? The cosmos as ordered. The idea of the universalist order that preceded modern thinking has shifted, but it remains there. So, which would kind of be there in the terrain of the epistemological, I don't know. Maybe we do need that. I don't know…

BILJANA KAŠIĆ

One more question: since you, and Silvana too, spoke about resisting the term *critique,* I wonder how to create, as Silvana said, this ethical opening beyond the critique?

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Well, I call it poethics. I use 'poethics' to get away with the critic and other things, that's, you know, but poethics is something, it's not a thing, it is a praxis. And then it opens to welcome different gestures, different transfers, and then also different names I used ... maybe it is because of so much influence by the poststructuralist trainings that I had when I was a child, I'm kind of resistant to say that it is something that sits in front of modern epistemology. You see, better not to do that. And then the poethics allows you to open a conversation, and then to consider and to imagine different praxes that will happen. I think – what I'm trying to say – is that I like that moment, and I think maybe that's all we have in a way is the opening up instead of closing. If you close it, if you give a name and close it and establish its limits, it's like all those critical strategies we have. Then you have to repeat the modes of categorising, you know, confining movement of thinking. Even in the moment of naming something, poethics I like because it opens, and it allows you to misbehave and not to get to that next moment.

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

Biljana, it is also an effort. Once you go and read Denise's work, there is also an effort to explain why they fail, why there is no

production of other from that logic, or from any logic of including, from acknowledging cultural difference. There is a kind of self-reproductive aim; it is very clear that whatever you claim is also instituted by your claim. There is always this logic that everything must be taken to universality or totality, even with historical materialism, even with the left... So, in a way, at one point, in her work, there is really this move that she builds out of a choice, which is also that the choice of the tools used by social scientists, normally, fail and have failed throughout history. In her work, there is always this move. I mean, maybe, Denise doesn't know because it is still on the move...

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

No, I don't know because I know I don't want to. When I say I don't know, it means that I don't want to finish up this statement. I don't think we need it. I think it is also about living with some precarity; it's a simple dichotomy, of course, because modern philosophy begins with the damn problem of *certainty*, this damn problem of certainty that has imposed onto us a concern with knowing. It's almost impossible to get out of it because knowing with certainty is what brings all those closures and enclosures, makes them necessary, because without them, there's no certainty whatsoever. The precarity, then; I don't think of it as just the opposite, but it could be so that, number one, embracing that precarity and being okay with it, and then, there is the other aspect of it. And also moving away from the question of knowing, that's what I mean. You find it everywhere; at the core, you find that the question that the philosopher or the social theorist is attempting to deal with, is knowledge. But why knowledge? And then, what other questions are possible, if we do need questions as a guide for thinking, and then if thinking always presumes some kind of question, how else can we go about existence without thinking in that way? I mean, thinking that way because we're always thinking about things, generally. That's why I don't know because I think there is something that precedes the naming of the practice**.** If it is epistemology, then it's because that is a privilege of thinking, knowing. If we are not privileging knowing, then, it's something else, or everything else that becomes possible to contemplate, if knowledge is not what's guiding thinking itself. There is existence, and it's not the basis for naming, separating, classifying, and deciding on, you know, who lives and dies when there is a global pandemic. Anyway, those are the things we're dealing with.

FRANCESCA MARIA GABRIELLI

Thank you so much, Denise, for this fascinating film. I would like to go back to the question of spirituality, if I may, because I have this curiosity whether this idea of implicancy – which is, if I understand correctly, indebted to quantum physics – was maybe inspired by the Buddhist notion of *Anatta*, i.e., of non-self or no-separate-self, of inter-being.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Not explicitly, as you ask, but probably implicitly in the same way that I got inspiration from Afro-Brazilian religions I grew up with. So, yes, I think. It's not the concept, but I'm thinking of all those things that I use in my practice — they all presuppose *inseparability*. It's just something that isn't praxis, it is in living and growing up, but not conceptually, no implicancy I thought. The quantum physics storm is entanglement, but entanglement, I was saying before, presupposes the principle of separation, because the tools, both the technological apparatus and the mathematical ones for describing those particles, they have this first position of separation. The quantum physicist David Bohm also uses the notion of 'implicated order', which is not quite exactly what I know. It is entanglement with a different explanation on two levels. Then, I thought that implicancy makes more sense precisely because of these non-prepositions. Not because it doesn't repose separations, but because not thinking about any particular concept, that's actually a kind of resisting it. What I find interesting about implicancy is not that it means something, it is again something that allows us to ask a question. What if we approach existence assuming that everything is fundamentally implicated, there is a continuation, but not because we are similar in the same context – you know, as long as you are in the same context, then you are in that, somehow searching and connected and being in somehow 'same', but because of the initial statement in intent, I mean not even 'the', it is the first statement and then the second. The particles that are found entangled, are particles which have been in close contact at some moment in the trajectory of the cosmos, which means that, you know, if the Big Bang theory is correct, all particles were there, in that, whatever that thing was. So, everything. In addition to the statement that everything is entangled, it is implicated, or it also reminds us that everything that exists now in this planet, is all just the composition of those particles that have emerged in the beginning of the universe. If

we begin with it, then it allows us to begin the question with an approach to existence that is not necessarily concerned with origins of anything in particular. Because those particles and those elements, thinking in terms of chemistry, were created inside of exploding stars 4, 5, 6 billion years ago. They are here, they are in my computer, they are allowing us to talk to each other. And they will continue to be here, maybe not here on Earth but, you know, 4, 5, 6 billion years from now, they will be part of other existing cosmic entities, which already exist, anyway, because there is no time passage at that level. So, entanglement then, for instance, implicancy allows us to think about the quantic and the cosmic, at the same time, as we are describing existence here on Earth. And that complexification is what interests me, rather than other connections.

MIRELA DAKIĆ

I also found interesting the way you write 'poethics', poetics and ethics together, and we can't see it only in writing we can hear it, which is also very important. And, for me, your movie was about the crucial impossibility to think or to do one without the other. What we conceive in language as separated, as thinking, and doing also, we have always a certain opposition to deconstruct. My first question is how you see the relation of the poethics as you write it, and the kind of antirepresentational fragmented form which questions the usual modes of representation, like Earth separated from water, fire from water, hot from cold, masculine from feminine, solid from fluid, and so on. My second question is, how do you see the part of the one or the other who watches the film in this relation of poethics and fragments, and of her or his involvement in the constitution of this play between the fragment and the whole?

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Thank you, Mirela. You came up with a very nice question. So, for the first part of the question, I think for the 'poethical', it's open to so many different things. To me, there is a gesturing, as I was saying before, a gesture of acknowledging the separations and violations. Concerning separations and violations, that is, something there, that we can call an excess, and then moving towards, exploring what that excess is suggesting without being, without naming. Because it's not that excess, that is, something in there that just opens the possibility for thinking beyond; beyond

that grammar, or beyond that whole, so the practical opens it up. It's an opening, not an opening of horizons, but thinking more of an opening beyond horizons. It's an opening to existence without the world, without that subjectivity for whom everything else is a world, or that subjectivity for whom everything else is nature to be known. So, without that projecting entities…The films are disturbing, *Serpent Rain* more explicitly, at least to Arjuna and me; it is more explicit than *4 Waters.* Talking about *Serpent Rain* is disturbing because we begin with that question of how to make a film without time, and then, in *4 Waters,* how to make a film without light, white light. In *Serpent Rain* we used these long shots, 3-minute-long shots, showing up, apparently showing nothing, without any movement. Watching it as we were editing it, we're thinking that the people would hate us for doing that; at the same time, we wanted this, we wanted bad effects to happen. This is all; I think that's a long way of saying about the films. Whatever else can happen, we don't know, but for the person who is watching the film, we just want he/she or them to be disturbed by it. Something anticipated came up. And we know we failed because we used images and then images have that, all those meanings, all those connections that cannot be controlled by the film, what the film wants to say. So, we were also disturbed by the film like you, knowing what it will do. I remember, when we showed it at the Berlin Biennale, somebody asked the question about why we didn't have indigenous knowledges in there. I didn't know how to begin to say that: "oh, don't, please, don't. We have not, this is not, but, please, do not do it." And then "how can you say that someone cannot do that because the film allows for that", and then we must live with it, right? And then we live with it. The disturbance is there; we tried to disturb, and then, at the same time, that attempt is… I know I didn't say anything specifically about the fragments and the whole, because it's a whole, I mean. Even the film is not a totality, but it is self-enclosed in some ways. It is, also, I think, what I'm trying to highlight here, is that the film is occupied, and sometimes it can be hijacked by aspects of it that we have to have, that conjure. The size of that subject we are trying to display is large, so it's more complicated, I think.

RENATA JAMBREŠIĆ KIRIN

Denise, your visual epistemology is revealing and inspiring in so many ways. For me, the liberating moment was your 'political provocation', the possibility to interpret earthquake

as an event of supernatural beauty or as 'productive' geological violence. Natural catastrophe seemed to be a reminder that cosmic forces and the geological history of the Earth are still governing our lives. But it also appeared as a catalyst for or an indicator of social processes. Also, the transcendental beauty of some filmed images being the result of the great earthquake in Haiti in the late 18th century reminded me of great images of the Croatian landscape after the devastating earthquake that struck central Croatia on December 29th last year. As in Haiti, numerous sinkholes that opened during and after the earthquake, are results of liquefaction. It is an aesthetic-destructive gesture produced by the power and fury of the Earth. But let's return to the social dimension. The Croatian earthquake provoked the unexpected wave of empathy, humanitarian enthusiasm, and solidarity with inhabitants of one of the poorest, war-torn regions in Croatia. The natural disaster temporarily improved the mental condition of the nation, exhausted and scattered by the pandemic. Of course, that humanitarian 'honey- moon' did not last long. So, my question is more of a dilemma: what happened when natural disasters leaned on slow devastation made by the wild capitalism transition and neo-colonial politics? In Croatia, as well as in Southeast Europe, these policies have already created a devastated landscape of ruins, rubbles, poverty, and hopelessness. And, of course, it's not an isolated case.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

I used to teach a course on natural disasters, on racial and natural disasters, just to talk about how natural disasters are not natural disasters at all. And then, of course, in the film we do both, we ask the question, I mean, we make that bad connection between the earthquake and the Haitian Revolution, but then, asking the question, which I think is also the question you are suggesting, is the right thing to do. What if our descriptions of the conditions under which we exist now were not guided by the judicial figure of the state and the historical ethical figure of the nation, which allow for and justify so many violations, including the violations of global capital, the violations that display resources or allocate resources or over explain away that which is a fact of global capital. So, what if it considered exactly that, the cosmic as the guide for, in the case of the Haitian Revolution, as another player in that revolution, but also because it's planetary. It's also planetary possibility, of thinking beyond those borders, whether they are

historical borders or national borders or ethnic borders. So, it's so very complex, but something we are thinking with the earthquake may allow us to do, which is, to break the chain of efficacy that explains things away through connections that privilege identity or conditions as in terms of their particularity. But that's always an effort, it takes an effort because we are more likely to explain things historically and juridically and isolate a particular political economic moment as being crucial instead of approaching what happens in terms of this larger global planet or planetary contacts. Then it allows us to see how the devastation that follows the natural occurrence is always an announced devastation. Not only because of what happened in the past, but because the past will be used to explain the future to-come. So, I think that's crucial, and I know it's very general, but it plays out, I think this pandemic is allowing us to see how it plays out, I mean, in decisions about who is allowed to die here in Canada... It is really crazy the way it's going and the decisions about who is allowed to die and at the same time how the state is dealing with the pandemic. Who is allowed to die — the essential workers in Ontario or in Toronto, the people of colour. What the state is just doing about the pandemic, the state is telling people not to go to restaurants; it's not going to restaurants that is killing people, it's working, because they can go to work; they do not have sick leave, so they have to work. You know the explanation is a natural one, is a virus is a.., is a..., is a pandemic that's killing them. But it's not that. Anyway, what you said just makes me think about the ways in which necessity operates in a natural disaster.... But then, at the same time, the earthquake, or the pandemic, even though the second one is different, but the earthquake is also reminding us that these problems and ways of explaining things are not only limited, but they are very much active in the disasters that follow.

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

Denise, I cannot find the words for thanking you for the generosity, the illuminations, the propagations to another sort of thinking you have offered us. It's already 7:00 o'clock, but I would like to add something. As you know, this is a very open hospitable space for novelty and shared practice; after you, this time, we will have a heavy investment in arts; many papers will focus on the question of performativity. So, not necessarily as a question or a request, but more as a desire for inspiration, I would like to ask you something about your original invention of a PhD

in Vancouver, at British Columbia that deals with art. I know, from when I was there as your guest, that many people in the world are looking at this experiment, also in pedagogy, with great interest. I know, myself and some of the girls who are here, that Lidia Curti, my mentor, who died some months ago, created at the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies in Naples, an academic place which favours the idea that art, even if it cannot solve questions, highlights priorities. Recently you yourself have been attending the field of art by working very closely with some young artists. Tomorrow, Nabila will give us some images of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, with whom you have been having a very interesting, very intense, dialogue. Can you leave us maybe by opening this other level, or layer of existence**?**

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Well, I can. I can say just briefly because it is an experiment. It's the Critical Creative Social Justice Studies Program. We have the graduate program, and we probably have to design an undergraduate program. The idea was, on one hand, to design the program that reflected what I was doing and what I saw other people are doing already, especially, this new generation, the young generation of artists who are BIPOC LGBTQ+ artists who are critical and they are demanding more. So, like they have read everything we have written and now they're saying like *Now what, now what!* So, because we can't give them, the answer can be *OK, so let's do the work together*. The idea was to have such a program that we call a 'critical creative' and it is practice-based, practice-led. It's not only open to artists; the program is also responding to this new generation of people who want to have a PhD, but who don't want to become academics because the university has gone new liberal and who wants to do that? They are activists, they're doing all kinds of work... As part of their final product, in the MA or the PhD program, they can create all kinds of objects, including a program for an NGO, a social justice organisation, or whatever. This is a generation that's asking us like *okay, it is time for something else*. That it's not within the limits of the critique, but it takes the critique into account. Also, you know what's happening to the university, and how we can justify doing the kind of critical work we do, knowing that our students will not feel good if they find employment at the university, they will feel more uncomfortable than we do at this moment. It's part of it. And, despite this, I think it is good, and it's an amazing thing. I mean, I talk with those young

kids; I'm so in love with them because they are doing something. I was talking with some of them because I have this ongoing conversation with some Brazilian graduate students and some of them are artists. I think, at least, in Brazil, the last time we had a generation of, you know, BIPOC thinkers and artists, which was probably in the 50s, the kind of generation that shifted things. I can tell it because my generation is just in between them. So, I was exposed to the ones who came before, and I can see them. And we were not, we were not a break. But, in Brazil, and elsewhere, it was a break, and I find it really inspiring. So, every time I have the chance to hang out with them, I do; they're really inspiring me…

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

And I know that you are contributing to this break very strongly. We love you also because of that, Denise. All of us. We can very warmly clap…

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA

Thank you so much for the invitation to be part of the program. I wish I could be present; maybe next time I will join you in person as a member of the group.

Thanks to everybody.

How Do Female Artists Live? A Word About the Project and Chapter's Visuals

selma banich and Nina Gojić

Reproductions of the artworks accompanying three chapters in this collection are taken from the feminist survey *Kako žive umjetnice / How Do Female Artists Live?* (2017-2018). The survey was designed to open a dialogue on how female artists in Croatian town Rijeka and the vicinity live, whether they can earn a living, and how they go about it. The survey didn't strive to be scientific in nature but merely a method of spotting joint trends, problems, and phenomena in the sphere of female labour in culture. It consisted of a questionnaire and a series of interviews with female artists. Accompanying publication *Kako žive umjetnice / How Do Female Artists Live?* (2018) edited by selma banich and Nina Gojić gathers an analysis of the questionnaire, a selection of answers from the interviews with female artists and selected artworks created at the workshops or as a contribution of the artist to the title topic – *How Do Female Artists Live?* The publication is available online: http://bit.ly/kakoziveumjetnice.

Another outcome of the survey was a collaborative mural. Since the city administration did not approve the location for the mural, artists decided to create a mobile mural, or rather a banner, which has been used in the fight for artistic, labour and reproductive rights of women.

Namely, in 2016 Rijeka was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2020 for its programme "The Port of Diversity".

The culture became the focus of the city administration and citizens, but it did not imply understanding of the precarious position, aspirations and achievements of (mostly freelance) female artists. The survey *Kako žive umjetnice / How Do Female Artists Live?* was thus conceived as the contribution to the current struggle for female artistic, labour, and reproductive rights, with intention to inscribe a tangible trace of that struggle in the public space of the city.

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selma banich (1979, Yugoslavia) is an artist, activist, and community organizer from Zagreb, Croatia. Her artistic practice is grounded in explorative, processual, and activist work, and is politically inspired by anarchism and feminism. selma has worked independently and in collaboration with other artists, curators, groups, and initiatives in the Balkans, Europe, and the US. She has participated in numerous dance, theater, opera, and film productions as a choreographer and performer. She participates in local and transnational solidarity initiatives related to the ongoing feminist, anti-fascist, migrant, and workers' struggles. Currently, those initiatives are Zagreb Solidarity City and For BREAD. She is currently attending training for expressive art therapy practitioners.



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This volume is the result of the close collaboration between the University of Naples L'Orientale and the scholars organizing and participating in the postgraduate course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Its red thread is the reflection on the productive permeation of feminist theory, activism, and artistic practices, with a special emphasis on 'forgotten' feminist concepts and the resilience demonstrated by technological, discursive, and artistic female practices when thematising and confronting, that is, trans/forming dangerous and regressive processes in regional and global contexts.

Feminist Trans/Formations. Media, Art, Literature is a collection of academic texts written by scholars with expertise in the fields of feminism and gender studies. It is a result of a highly cultivated tradition of feminist reading and interrelatedness with philosophical thought, cultural studies, anthropology, oral history, literary theory, and literary criticism. The authors carefully examine the social position of women and gender and queer minorities, as well as the state of feminist values within the social tendencies of the new millennium. The very conscious intention of this collection is to encourage the best traditions of the humanities to openly question and understand cultural production and social practices. It is meant to be a textbook for students in the humanities, which not only educates but also promotes a responsible, critical, and sustainable society. *Feminist Trans/Formations. Media, Art, Literature* is a significant contribution to the development of theory that examines the effects of neoliberal, conservative, and populist social transformation.

Assoc. Prof. Sanja Potkonjak, University of Zagreb, Croatia

This collection is valuable because it provides bold, theoretically informed, empirically exhaustive, and contextually situated analyses and readings of the entire range of feminist interventions, from classic concepts to ingenious new interpretations by contemporary authors and artists such as Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Elena Ferrante, Saadat Hasan Manto, Meša Selimović, Vlaho Stulli, Andreja Kulunčić, selma banich, Anabel Zanze, and others. This book's simultaneous ethical and methodological relevance is that it highlights marginalised voices — from the epistemologically downplayed to female artists neglected in traditional media and artistic circles. It has made a significant contribution to the gender analysis of the representation of different groups in media and art, to the critique of power structures and economic dynamics, to the development of new theoretical frameworks and methodologies for analysing media and art, and emphasising the complexity and interconnectedness of factors in understanding these fields. The book highlights the danger of distorted or stolen concepts, as well as the uncritical reception of ideas (with a particular emphasis on the appropriation of women's writing, known as 'écriture féminine'). Using feminist critical analysis, the authors explore current events and historical heritage from a transdisciplinary and international perspective, and this is where the volume's broad social interest lies.

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